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RUDYARD KIPLING

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RUDYARD KIPLING

by

RUPERT CROFT-COOKE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

ONE of the titles in Kipling's *Many Inventions* is "The Finest Story in the World." The words appear in inverted commas and are not, of course, intended to refer to any existing fiction, but to a story within a story, a story which was never told. It would be as well to gather all we can of what this would have been like. For if we know what Kipling regarded as the ideal piece of narrative we shall understand better his actual achievements.

In Kipling's own tale, not the one to which he applies the superlative, there are only three characters—Charlie Mears, a bank-clerk with literary aspirations ; Grish Chunder, "a young, fat, full-bodied Bengali" ; and the narrator, who is Kipling himself. (For unlike so many story-tellers when they use the first person, Kipling made no attempt to conceal his own identity, but seemed rather to take pleasure in making the conventional "I" of the narrative an inquisitive and not unsuccessful writer.) It tells how Charlie Mears has dreams of his previous existences, precise and vivid dreams of his incarnations as a Greek galley-slave and a Viking in the ninth or tenth century. He begins to describe these to the narrator, who makes notes and realises the value of the other's occult knowledge. Grish Chunder is introduced as a Hindu, a believer in reincarnation, who says that he has heard of this remembering of previous existences among his

people, but adds that if Charlie Mears "spoke" this world would end now. These things are not allowed. Further, he points out that Charlie will cease to remember anything when he falls in love, and so the "finest story in the world" will never be written.

This is just what happens. To Charlie Mears it "came like a thunderclap"—"a girl with a curly head and foolish slack mouth." "Love killed his remembrance."

But what of the story that might have been written if his unnatural insight had lasted a little longer? First of all, it *was* a story. It never seemed to occur to the narrator that there were valuable historical data here, that his notes on Charlie's recollections of life in two ancient periods could at least, incomplete though they were, have supplied the material for an essay. It was a story or nothing. "To me of all men," says the narrator when the full knowledge of what he had found in Charlie Mears was his, "had been given the chance to write the most marvellous tale in the world, nothing less than the story of a Greek galley-slave told by himself."

The story came first, as it always did with Kipling. We shall see that he never fiddled with character and background, with psychology and emotion, with subtleties of thought and reaction, until and unless he had a story to tell. All the rest were mere pigments to be used as he needed them for the high purpose of narrative. The precious gift of Charlie's dreams must not be wasted on an academic reconstruction of the period, a mere article in an encyclopaedia; it must be used to that most exalted end—a story.

For it could be real. Nothing need be left to the imagination of the reader—or of the writer for that matter. In these visions there would be found bright details which

would be a thousand times more concrete than all the tricks and touches with which story-tellers tried to make vivid their scenes. "He would supply me—here I capered among the dumb gods of Egypt and laughed in their battered faces—with material to make my tale sure—so sure that the world would hail it as an impudent and vamped fiction."

Sure—Kipling could have used no more revealing word. A sure tale, a tale in which the writer spoke as one having authority, as one who had done or seen or heard these things. In this same collection of tales there is one of a lighthouse-keeper among the Java currents, one about subalterns on leave in London, one about elephants, another consisting of a letter written in London by a Punjabi Mussulman paying his first visit, another about private soldiers in India, and so on. Each has that sureness, which has jealously but unjustly been called cocksureness. It is as though Kipling had lived all these lives. And if there is a false note here and there it never comes from any uncertainty of his medium in the narrow sense. He might, in those early days, make a gaffe in his interpretation of human nature; he could never err in describing a fight with Pathans on the North-West Frontier, or the sinking of the foundations for a bridge across the Ganges.

When Charlie Mears heard "nearly the whole of 'The Saga of King Olaf,'" he listened "open-mouthed, flushed, his hands drumming on the back of the sofa," and on being asked if it wasn't better than Byron he cried—" 'Better? Why, it's true! How could he have known?' " And that attitude is exactly what Kipling demands of his reader, and has every right to demand. "How could he have known?" must ask the men of varied professions, the people of many races and places, whom he describes.

To call this journalism, to picture Kipling as a reporter running about the world with notebook and pencil, is to misunderstand this faculty for sureness. It may be true that he deliberately gathered scraps of curious knowledge and used them in his work. But his "sureness" transcended any such methodical scrapbook-making. It was like the sureness of Charlie Mears himself, who had been there in another life, who had been chained to an oar and *knew* what it was like. It was the sureness of the artist's imagination, something more realistic and accurate than the reporter's shorthand notes.

"So sure," Kipling said of the story that would be written from Charlie Mears's material, "that the world would hail it as an impudent and vamped fiction." He believed, in other words, that so far from it being fiction which occasionally, by using all the devices of realism, aspires to a semblance of fact so that it appears to the reader a relation of what has actually taken place, it is fact which at its highest and purest may sometimes approach the level of truthfulness which art maintains. He believed, I think, that since history, as much as art, is selection, the artist is more likely to re-create the past with a fanciful tale than the historian with his masses of contemporary data, however carefully collected and laboriously transcribed. But the fanciful tale must rest on a steel framework of correct observation.

We shall see as we consider his work how again and again this passion for accuracy, to use an exalted epithet for it, was in Kipling the very impulse of his work. What to other writers might be no more than an irritating necessity in presenting certain men and things, reducible almost to the need for consulting a text-book, with Kipling was art

itself. He seemed even to seek out the outlandish and intricate, to test himself with backgrounds, characters, technical intractabilities each more exigent than the last, to say in effect that no man's life, no machinery, no unvisited fastness of history or geography was so obscure that he could not master it, and reveal it to the world, so that the world would say like Charlie Mears, "Why, it's true! How could he have known?"

It will be noted that Charlie's story, if it could have been written, would have taken place under none of the arc-lights of history. It was almost a condition with Kipling that his stories in their settings should be esoteric, though he was determined to make their interest universal. A Greek galley-slave kept alive with "rotten figs and black beans and wine in a skin bag" would have been his protagonist, who died in a maritime battle fought in a harbour of the ancient world. For Charlie Mears, the ordinary bank-clerk who tells it, Kipling's contempt is scarcely concealed. "I met him in a public billiard-saloon. . . . He desired to make himself an undying name chiefly through verse, though he was not above sending stories of love and death to the penny-in-the-slot journals . . . he . . . was curiously careful to let me see that he knew his way about the world as befitted a bank-clerk on twenty-five shillings a week. . . . He would retain that ignorance, for bank-clerks do not understand metempsychosis, and a sound commercial education does not include Greek." Half a dozen times is Charlie referred to as "the bank-clerk." Indeed the narrator stresses the fact that "the present soul of Charlie Mears" bored him. But the previous incarnation, the galley-slave, the man working in an unfamiliar time and at a task which existed no more—there was a character for the finest story

in the world. Kipling wanted all his writing life no everyday period, no bread-and-butter hero, but an English boy left on the streets of India, a child raised by a pack of wolves, an artist who went blind, schoolboys who didn't play games, and countless people who are known only to the far reaches of the world, or to the coloured backwaters of history. It was not that his people were not commonplace in themselves, for as often as not they were notably so. It was that the things they did or their homes, the work on which they were engaged or their ambitions, were never commonplace, rarely even familiar to most readers. It was as though Kipling had been touched by that contemporary convention that a story must be about something or someone "special," a convention which made Sherlock Holmes a drug-taker, and gave popularity to Rider Haggard, Anthony Hope, Hall Caine, Sax Rohmer, Cutcliffe Hyne and many vanished writers whose stories of "queer," "sensational," "foreign," "historical" or "uncanny" events filled the pages of the shilling magazines on railway bookstalls fifty years ago. Kipling never stressed the bizarre, or, except in a few deliberate ghost-stories, the occult. He was no mere whistler-up of such abnormalities as Dr. Fu-Manchu or "She." But he was convinced, apparently, and at least for a time, that the best plots lay in out-of-the-way places and events.

The story which might have been written from the scraps which returned to Charlie Mears would have been based on a picture, a certain almost static and infinitely detailed picture, of the galley-slave chained to his oar.

"The sea spurts through the oar-holes and the men row sitting up to their knees in water. Then there's a bench running down between the two lines of oars and an overseer with a

whip walks up and down the bench to make the men work."

"How do you know that?"

"It's in the tale. There's a rope running overhead, looped to the upper deck, for the overseer to catch hold of when the ship rolls. When the overseer misses the rope once and falls among the rowers, remember the hero laughs at him and gets licked for it. He's chained to his oar of course—the hero."

"How is he chained?"

"With an iron band round his waist fixed to the bench he sits on, and a sort of handcuff on his left wrist chaining him to the oar. He's on the lower deck where the worst men are sent, and the only light comes from the hatchways and through the oar-holes. Can't you imagine the sunlight just squeezing through between the handle and the hole and wobbling about as the ship moves?"

Now it seems remarkable that there is just such a picture as the basis of almost every story that Kipling wrote. A little boy with blue eyes wearing a turban and squatting on the bronze barrel of an old gun in Lahore. A sea-serpent raising an enormous face out of a sea made misty by its clammy emergence—"it was not human, and it certainly was not animal . . . the mouth was open, revealing a ridiculously tiny tongue—as absurd as the tongue of an elephant; there were tense wrinkles of white skin at the angles of the drawn lips, white feelers like those of a barbel sprung from the lower jaw and there was no sign of teeth within the mouth. But the horror of the face lay in the eyes for those were sightless—white, in sockets as white as scraped bone, and blind." A great red-bearded white man wearing a gold crown as king of a forgotten people. A phantom rickshaw. An officer striking a man on parade so that "a piece of gray shirt showed under the torn scarlet on the man's shoulder." The tomb of an eighteenth-century

Englishman in remote Indian hills "hung about with wild flowers and nuts, packets of wax and honey, bottles of native spirits and infamous cigars, with buffalo horns and plumes of dried grass. At one end was a rude clay image of a white man, in the old-fashioned top-hat, riding on a bloated tiger." A man stopping an express train "with the red flag of the ninth hole of the links." And so on. The list is almost as long as that of Kipling's titles, and with ingenuity or the desire to make out a case could be made just as long.

When it is not a picture it is some easily summarised idea, such as a man might voice over a drink. A village community being persuaded by shrewd and deliberate propaganda to vote that the earth was flat. A native regiment which in the time of the Mutiny was driven beyond the Frontier, massacred by the tribesmen and haunts a certain mountain pass to this day. But the favourite basis is a picture. It was from a picture, an expert snapshot, that the finest story in the world would have been reconstructed.

It would have contained little of psychological subtlety, it would have told almost nothing of the reactions of the galley-slave, and at the end of it the protagonist would have been about as outwardly visible and inwardly obscure as Charlie Mears himself. In the course of the tale, in order to extract from Charlie Mears the information he needs, the narrator makes some forty interpolations, mostly in the form of direct questions, to jog Charlie's memory or serve as suggestions to him. It will be worth while to examine the most characteristic of these. Here, drawn naked from the dialogue, they are :

"You say your hero went pirating. How did he live?"

"What sort of ship?"

"How is he chained?"

"Was the ship built so long ago *as that*?"

"Have you the paper on you?" (On which Charlie had scribbled a contemporary inscription)

"But I want details."

"How was that managed?" (Referring to an oar which had shot up through the deck planking.)

"One minute, Charlie. When the sea topped the bulwarks what did it look like?"

"Now tell me something about the harbour where the fight was fought."

"When the rowers in the galley mutinied how did they kill their overseers?"

"You're sure you know nothing about Skroelings?"

"What's oar-thresh, Charlie?"

"Your ship has been built and designed closed and decked in; you said so yourself."

The inference is clear-cut. The narrator wanted the story and all those telling details which would make the story a visible thing. He never asked Charlie what he had felt, what he had thought, what were his reactions. The galley-slave was a galley-slave to him, a mere chessman pulled out of the box, carved in complete uniformity with other chessmen of his category, used for the game and returned to the box when the game was over. But the way in which he was chained, the way the sea looked as it topped the bulwarks, the method chosen by the rowers to kill their overseers when they revolted, what was oar-thresh, these were all-important questions put anxiously, sometimes breathlessly, to Charlie. The finest story in the world would have been eventful, intensely accurate, set in a far place, free of all subtlety in its characters' development, free of the delicate emotions of literature but full of gusto and the raw emotions of life. It would have been true in the highest sense, but its protagonist would have been a labelled and

animated dummy. It would have been convincing and moving, with enough humour to throw up its pathos and enough understanding (loving-kindness would be a better word) toward the people of a vanished world to make them move and smile and talk and love again before the reader's delighted eyes. It would, in fact, have been very like a story by the earlier Rudyard Kipling at his best.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL

RUDYARD KIPLING was born in Bombay in 1865. His father, John Lockwood Kipling, was Professor of Architectural Sculpture in the university there.

To recall that Kipling's grandfathers, both paternal and maternal, were Wesleyan ministers might be to suggest that his background was the narrow, controversial and intolerant Nonconformity of England in the middle of the last century. So far as immediate influences were concerned this would be untrue. His father was an artist and a scholar whose book *Beast and Man in India* is worth reading for its own sake, and in it, directly and indirectly, we may trace his influence on his son. In his Preface to *Life's Handicap* Kipling says that his tales have been "collected from all places and all sorts of people . . . and a few, but these are the very best, my father gave me." A good example is that gruesome little masterpiece, "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," which owes its central and most harrowing episode to a description in Lockwood Kipling's account of Crows in the second chapter of his book—though it is probable that such matters were common talk in the family. At all events the elder Kipling was a man of unusual culture, richly informed in many curious aspects of Indian life, though, it would appear from the Introductory chapter to *Beast and Man in India*, no blind admirer of Hindu civilisation.

Kipling's mother was one of five sisters. Two of them married men of distinction—Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Sir Edward Poynter—while another was the mother of the first Lord Baldwin of Bewdley.

Kipling was sent home to England at the age of six, following the custom of Europeans in India. He had probably been as much spoilt as most children in an English household there. Remembering the time and place and his father's status, one imagines him being loved and cosseted by half a dozen servants, and he seems never to have forgotten it.

"Baa Baa Black Sheep," which in its English passages is certainly autobiographical, as *Something of Myself* reveals, is probably as much so in its picturesque and sentimental little opening scene. And even if it was not intended by its author to represent his own childhood, the picture it makes is true of almost any British household in India at that time—or to this day, for that matter :

They were putting Punch to bed—the *ayah* and the butler and Meeta, the big house boy with the red and gold turban. Judy, already tucked inside her mosquito-curtains, was nearly asleep. Punch had been allowed to stay up for dinner. Many privileges had been accorded to Punch within the last ten days, and a greater kindness from the people of his world had encompassed his ways and works, which were mostly obstreperous. He sat on the edge of his bed and swung his bare legs defiantly.

"Punch-*baba* going to bye-lo?" said the *ayah* suggestively.

"No," said Punch. "Punch-*baba* wants the story about the Rancee that was turned into a tiger. Meeta must tell it, and the butler shall hide behind the door and make tiger-noises at the proper time."

"But Judy-*baba* will wake up," said the *ayah*.

"Judy-*baba* is waking," piped a small voice from the mosquito-curtains. "There was a Rancee that lived at Delhi.

Go on, Meeta," and she fell fast asleep again while Meeta began the story.

Never had Punch secured the telling of that tale with so little opposition. He reflected for a long time. The butler made the tiger-noises in twenty different keys.

"Top!" said Punch authoritatively. "Why doesn't Papa come in and say he is going to give me *put-pat*?"

"Punch-baba is going away," said the *ayah*. "In another week there will be no Punch-baba to pull my hair any more." She sighed softly, for the boy of the household was very dear to her heart.

"Up the Ghauts in a train?" said Punch, standing on his bed. "All the way to Nassick, where the Ranee-tiger lives?"

"Not to Nassick this year, little *Sahib*," said Meeta, lifting him on his shoulder. "Down to the sea where the coco-nuts are thrown, and across the sea in a big ship. Will you take Meeta with you to England?"

"You shall all come," said Punch, from the height of Meeta's strong arms. "Meeta and the *ayah* and the butler, and Bhini-in-the-Garden, and the beat-the-drum snake-man."

There was no mockery in Meeta's voice when he replied, "Great is the *Sahib's* favour," and laid the little man down in the bed, while the *ayah*, sitting in the moonlight at the doorway, lulled him to sleep with an interminable canticle such as they sing in the Roman Catholic Church at Parel. Punch curled himself into a ball and slept.

The next few years have been described by Kipling variously in three places, first rather sketchily and fancifully in *The Light that Failed*, then in all their detailed agony in short story "Baa Baa Black Sheep" and, finally, many years later but with no more detachment in *Something of Myself*. Certain things are common to all of these. There is the "austere little villa" by the sea. "The tide ran out nearly two miles on that coast and the many-coloured mud-banks, touched by the sun, sent up a lamentable smell of sea-weed." There is Aunt Rosa of the short story, who is Mrs. Jennett

of the novel, with her cane, her Bible, her hatred and contempt for the small boy in her charge. There is the little girl who shared his miseries, his sister Judy in the short story, his friend Maisie in the novel. Punch, of "Baa Baa Black Sheep," is found by his parents on their return to be nearly blind, Dick Helder of the novel in fact becomes blind later and Kipling was myopic. "Good God, the little chap's nearly blind!" cried the family doctor from India when he found Black Sheep. There is little reason to doubt that the neglect, the stupidity, even the malignance of Kipling's English guardian was blamed by him for his life-long shortsightedness, and probably with every reason.

But there was something else which seems to have troubled him more, for it is stressed in all three of the chronicles. It is that the woman, whoever she was, who had the care of the little boy from India, had a way of tripping him into confused inaccuracies and then calling him a liar.

Since she chose to regard him as a hopeless liar, when dread of pain drove him to his first untruth he naturally developed into a liar, but an economical and self-contained one, never throwing away the least unnecessary fib, and never hesitating at the blackest, were it only plausible, that might make his life a little easier.

That is written of Mrs. Jennett and Dick Helder, but with Auntie Rosa and Punch Kipling goes further :

"Untrustworthy in one thing, untrustworthy in all," said Auntie Rosa, and Harry felt that Black Sheep was delivered into his hands. He would wake him up in the night to ask him why he was such a liar.

"I don't know," Punch would reply.

"Then don't you think you ought to get up and pray to God for a new heart?"

"Y-yes."

"Get out and pray then!" And Punch would get out of bed with raging hate in his heart against all the world, seen and unseen. He was always tumbling into trouble. Harry had a knack of cross-examining him as to his day's doings which seldom failed to lead him, sleepy and savage, into half a dozen contradictions—all duly reported to Auntie Rosa next morning.

"But it *wasn't* a lie," Punch would begin, charging into a laboured explanation that landed him more hopelessly in the mire. "I said that I didn't say my prayers *twice* over in the day, and *that* was on Tuesday. *Once* I did. I *know* I did, but Harry said I didn't," and so forth, till the tension brought tears, and he was dismissed from the table in disgrace.

"You usen't to be so bad as this?" said Judy, awe-stricken at the catalogue of Black Sheep's crimes. "Why are you so bad now?"

"I don't know," Black Sheep would reply. "I'm not, if I only wasn't bothered upside down. I know what I *did* and I want to say so, but Harry always makes it out different somehow, and Auntie Rosa doesn't believe a word I say."

It was this which stung, this which Kipling did not forget or forgive, certainly before he had worked it off in print and perhaps not even then. The woman had done worse than call him a liar—she had made him one. Kipling grew to a man and realised the injury, and revenged himself as best he could by the two portraits of Auntie Rosa and Mrs. Jennett. He worshipped the truth in all its manifestations, as a writer, and, it can be said with certainty, as a man. He had been tricked into irreverence for truth and he found it as hard to forgive the people responsible in his childhood for that as it must have been later to view amiably the editors of *Lippincott's Magazine*, who persuaded him to write a happy ending for *The Light that Failed*. The happy ending appeared in that periodical, but in the English edition was the haughty Preface—"This is the story of *The Light that Failed* as

originally conceived by the Writer." And on the title-page of another book he quoted from Ecclesiastes: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

His schooldays were happier. He was sent to the United Services College at Westward Ho!, an institution now defunct. It seems to have been a rather self-conscious little school run economically for the sons of Army and Naval officers, with a headmaster whom Kipling greatly respected then and thereafter. Perhaps for the first time Kipling had friends of his own age—two in particular—and although both of them as well as Kipling himself in trying to recall their days together have differed in many respects, in one thing all are agreed—the solidarity of their trio.

Later, of course, Kipling told seductively coloured stories of their adventures in *Stalky and Co.*, a greatly idealised version of schooldays which seem to have been pleasant and adventurous in fact. Objection has been taken to the book as "exaggerated." But it made no pretence to be a day-to-day account of the doings of three actual schoolboys, and should not be judged by these standards. It is a saga, and its characters are inflated to the girth and stature of mighty heroes moving proudly among the scholarly midgets, the games-playing riff-raff, the rest of the school. If its readers wish to gather from it some inkling of what the boy Kipling was like, what kind of a school he attended and what sort of schooldays he passed they may do so, but only if they have the faculty for perceiving what in it is historical and what is idealised or condensed or flood-lit to make fiction. From shoddy American films of everyday life in the States an Englishman who has never crossed the Atlantic may in fact perceive the true nature of that life, which even the

director cannot wholly conceal though every single incident may be a distortion. But again, only if he knows what to look for, if he has an instinct for reality when he sees it. Kipling's intention in *Stalky and Co.* was to tell a story, and before they died the two other members of the trio, old men then, tried no doubt conscientiously to examine that story and decide whether it was "true." They seem scarcely to have recognised themselves. One of them points out minor inconsistencies. And yet I think that Kipling portrayed his schooldays more faithfully than other writers who have slaved to evoke them under the domination of old diaries, in sedulous passages of their autobiographies. For he gave the essence of them. With his usual flair for "sureness" and truth he portrayed himself and his friends, in caricature, if you like, but in revealing caricature.

The impression left by reading *Stalky and Co.* is of very dashing exploits in the glorious sunshine and freedom of Devonshire summers sixty years ago, exploits that were always in good taste as opposed to the suggested bad taste of assistant masters, other boys and particularly of a school lecturer on patriotism. Exploits moreover which owed their audacity and success more to the heroic qualities of that born leader Stalky, his scarcely less epic lieutenant M'Turk, than to the more studious Beetle, who was Kipling himself. So his penchant for hero-worship, his reverence for men of action to whom leadership and authority come naturally, may have begun in his teens. Indeed so inherent a part is it of the writer, so persistently does it show itself throughout his work, that it could scarcely have been otherwise.

Kipling was physically a little man, so short-sighted that all his life he peered out from behind the massively thick lenses of his spectacles. He may have had great endurance

but he gave the impression, not of frailty—he was altogether too vital and sinewy for that—but of being as spindly in limb as he was short in stature. Although he was born and brought up in a society which made physical exertion, sport, games, the most serious business of life, there is no evidence discoverable that he excelled in any physical activity whatever. It is in this, I think, that we may find an explanation for the respect he gave to such men as Stalky (who in real life justified all that Kipling had anticipated for him), and to all the subalterns and soldiers, the adventurers and fighters whom he drew. Not that he often stressed their bodily power or grace or even good looks. Occasionally, as in "The Brushwood Boy," he presents one of them as though he were a lion-tamer demonstrating the creature's points. But for the most part he is content to let their strength and suppleness be assumed or deduced from playful incidents which suggest them. This does not conceal his almost jealous admiration. In Study Five Beetle may have been a strategist, a man of ideas, and we know that he won laurels with his verses. But he chose the right name for himself. He knew that he was a mere chronicler of the exploits of his more glorious friends.

At the age of seventeen he returned to India and remained there for seven years, after which he left the country and never returned to it as a resident. But those seven years were perhaps the most formative, the most *inhalent*, of his whole life. With childhood memories to assist him, with a brilliant father and a fond family settled there, with a job which gave him every opportunity, he seems to have gulped down knowledge of the country, sympathy and self-identification with many of its people—no one could know more than a few of the Indian races—understanding of men

and things, which were all uncannily complete. He was, as is well known, a journalist during that time working for the most part in the Punjab, his father having been made Curator of Lahore Museum. But he saw things which no other journalist had seen.

When we consider his work we shall see what these years taught him, not only of India but of life. It was now that consciously or unconsciously he formed the sympathies which his critics have mistaken for a creed. He saw that vast chaotic country crawling with life—so much of which was diseased or decaying—torn with racial hatreds, racked with ear-splitting discords, eternally dirty and hungry, flashing out marvellous beauty yet haunted with ceaseless fear, and it seemed to him that the only cool and reliable people were the men and women of his own race who ruled it. And all the hero-worship he had given to his friends at Westward Ho ! went to such men as Findlayson of "The Bridge-builders." "For three years he had endured heat and cold, disappointment, discomfort, danger and disease, with responsibility almost too heavy for one pair of shoulders ; and day by day, through that time, the great Kashi Bridge over the Ganges had grown under his charge."

It was what Kipling saw in those years, the wretchedness, the dishonesty, the shivering superstitions, the famine and disease relieved only, he believed, by the competence and self-sacrifice of a disciplined minority from the English public schools, which taught him his respect for "the Law," for government of the naturally governable by the natural ruler. (When later he dreamed of it in the West it set the cry of jingoist at his heels, and made his name inseparable from the word Imperialism.) It was the anecdotes he heard, the club-room reminiscences, and his own insight into the

multifarious and variegated life, which gave him the matter of his stories for many years to come, and it was on the actual experiences of these years, such as a journey towards Tibet which he used effectively in *Kim*, that much of his later narrative was built.

He has told us that he was overworked, often in bad health and towards the end of the time "ripe for change." But when he recalls the country later in two novels and many short stories his reader can gain no inkling that he was anything but happy there. Indeed, it is lovingly that in imagination he turns again to the sub-continent, lovingly, though with a touch of exasperation such as a son might feel with an elderly parent.

He made a journey through Burma to Hong Kong, Japan and so to the United States. But although he recounts it all carefully enough in *From Sea to Sea* it was not such voyaging as this which gave him his richest material—he needed to stay and feel and assimilate before he could find what he wanted. Indeed, his receptivity had begun to decline, as the direct receptivity of most writers has done nearly always in their twenties, sometimes before they are out of their teens. His stories are certainly set in places which he first saw years after this, and much of his work depends for its charm on his second discovery of England. But the tense wonder of the young man staring first on an enchanted world was already turning to a conscious curiosity about how everything and everyone worked, a more methodical and deliberate form of mental note-taking. So that the events of the rest of his life have less interest for a study of his work, an interest moreover which decreases as his life draws out.

He came to London and settled in Villiers Street in 1889, and began to enjoy a reputation which was soon to be at

least as clamorous as that of any English writer before or since, for he became while still in his twenties the most stirring and controversial figure in letters, a kind of brightly painted and shining motor-car hooting its way among the dignified carriages of literature.

In 1892 he married and recalls that it was "in the church with the pencil-pointed steeple at Langham Place—Gosse, Henry James and Ambrose Poynter being all the congregation present," and started on a world-tour for a honeymoon. At Yokohama, however, Kipling had news that his bank had failed and he retreated to New England where his wife had relatives. There they remained until 1896 when they returned to England and settled first at Torquay, then at Rottingdean where the Burne-Jones family had a house. They went to South Africa during the Boer War and finally settled in 1902 at Bateman's, Burwash, Sussex, where they lived till Kipling's death in 1936. The house is now a Kipling museum.

CHAPTER III

"PLAIN TALES FROM THE HILLS"

BY way of approach to the prose work of Rudyard Kipling, may I make one of those large generalisations about literature which, from their very categorical nature, can never be more than half-truths. I would say that in the fiction of the last five or six decades two extremes in method are noticeable—on the one hand that of a story which in itself is so powerful a thing that its protagonists can be little more than automata behaving as the plot demands, and on the other the creation of characters whose psychology demands such intricate revelation that all consideration of mere plot or even theme is subordinated, and events become no more than mirrors. It may be, though I suspect the conclusion as being too neat and consecutive, that in the greatest novels the balance between these two is found and maintained.

Now the first of these may be well enough for a short story—indeed some of the most productive and admirable short-story tellers rarely used anything else. O. Henry, Aumonier, Jack London, Doyle, Saki, Chesterton and Wells are examples. The other may produce something which will pass for a novel as D. H. Lawrence occasionally, and his imitators more often, showed. But it is when the first is used for a novel, as in Kipling's *The Light that Failed*, or the second is used for a short story, as in all the potty little

“ bits of writing ” which are published as short stories in present-day literary periodicals, that the results are disastrous.

Kipling was a short-story writer whose work had all the merits and defects of this medium. And when he first tackled a novel he carried these merits and defects with him. His mind, as clean and tidy as the engine-room of a ship, had no place for the debris, the rags and old bones of thought and emotion, the unnecessary and inconsistent relics which we call the subconscious. Order, pattern, perfection—that was the progression he demanded, and no dawdling however human, no chaos however natural. His characters must fit as perfectly as the wheels of a watch and remain as constant to their task. There would be jewels in their movements, but they must spend their existences in serving the passage of time. Such was his reverence for his art, the art of a story-teller, that he would allow no tampering with it, even from the men and women he had created. They must be kept in their places, adequate but clearly marked places on the scrupulous map.

He began with *Plain Tales from the Hills* which he had written mostly for Indian journals and which in book form was first published in India.

The stories, some of which must have been written before Kipling came of age, were immature, but in a rather curious way. It might be said that Kipling had an immaturity complex. His urgent need, as the first depicter of the lives and persons of the English in India, was to appear not only knowledgeable in fact and detail, as he was, but knowledgeable in human nature, in motives, in the subtlety of man, which he certainly was not. And as though forced to affect an insight which he could not yet possess he became knowing, blasé, man-of-the-worldish. “ One of the most effective

ways of out-Heroding Herod," wrote Dixon Scott, "is to yawn wearily when the head is brought in. Mr. Kipling's yawn was a masterpiece." Listen to his cockiness as he speaks of Anglo-Indians :

If you go straight away from Levées and Government House Lists, past Trades' Bills—far beyond everything and everybody you ever knew in your respectable life—you cross, in time, the Borderline where the last drop of White blood ends and the full tide of Black sets in. It would be easier to talk to a new-made Duchess on the spur of the moment than to the Borderline folk without violating some of their conventions or hurting their feelings. The Black and the White mix very quaintly in their ways. Sometimes the White shows in spurts of fierce, childish pride—which is Pride of Race run crooked—and sometimes the Black in still fiercer abasement and humility, half-heathenish customs and strange, unaccountable impulses to crime.

Notice his grand generalisations and the portentous way in which, for instance, he opens "Kidnapped" :

We are a high-caste and enlightened race, and infant-marriage is very shocking and the consequences are sometimes peculiar ; but, nevertheless, the Hindu notion—which is the Continental notion, which is the aboriginal notion—of arranging marriages irrespective of the personal inclinations of the married, is sound.

And the coolly irritating, hands-in-pockets, I-know-everything air with which he writes in "The Broken Link Handicap" :

Racing leads to the *shroff* quicker than anything else. But if you have no conscience and no sentiments, and good hands, and some knowledge of pace, and ten years' experience of horses, and several thousand rupees a month, I believe that you can occasionally contrive to pay your shoeing-bills.

It is all rather deplorable. But what is astonishing is that should have been mistaken for sophistication, that the

critics of the time, both professional and amateur, should have seen in him a wise man from the East. Surely a mere glance should have told them that it was nothing but shyness, and the wish to make the best of his material ?

He wanted to tell good stories. He had the incidents ready. Some of them may have been no more than bits of smoking-room scandal. Some perhaps he had artfully contrived from casual facts he had learnt. Some were pure invention. All of them took place in a country he knew and among people whom he believed he understood. He had the gift of speech. He had the guts and the gusto to set them down. But he was young. He was, so he had to believe, inexperienced. He did not wish to start as other writers had done with literary models, for he had it all straight from the horse's mouth. What the blazes, then ? Why *shouldn't* he tell his tales ?

And he did, with such energy and effect that he set Simla shuddering and London agape. Those first collections of short stories gave him a world-wide reputation and, what was far more important to the artist, the assurance he lacked. He never again wrote as though he needed to impress. From now on he could make the best of his tale without fear of appearing ingenuous.

But already in these anything but " plain " tales was perceptible a clean economy with words which made his work as shapely as a geometrical figure. Already he had learnt the only trick of characterisation that for many years he knew, which was to take a type (even, paradoxically, a unique type), give it a name, a face, an accent and a few staple and distinguishing qualities, and call it a character. Better writers had done it before him and lesser ones have tried it since, but how brilliantly he succeeded may be seen now from

the way in which we speak of Mrs. Hauksbee and Private Mulvaney as we do of Mr. Pecksniff or Colonel Newcome.

Mrs. Hauksbee, in fact, can scarcely be called a creation—she is a photograph. “At a moderate estimate there were about three-and-twenty sides to that lady’s character,” says Kipling plaintively, but we, knowing only one, simply do not believe him, nor does he ever give us any reason to do so. You may see her sitting in Maiden’s Hotel in Delhi or the Yacht Club in Bombay on any afternoon, and, remarkable and fortunate woman, she has not changed in the least since Kipling first saw her in Simla sixty years ago. She will be leaving India now and perhaps coming home First-Class on the ship which will carry, far down on the troop-decks, Privates Mulvaney, Learoyd and Ortheris.

For they, too, made their first appearance in this book. They are introduced first in a story called “The Three Musketeers,” and at once one is reminded of one of those usually rather tiresome smoking-room stories which start—“There was an Englishman, a Scotchman and an Irishman” (or “An Englishman, an American and a Frenchman”), and which proceed to describe a set of circumstances in which the first two, following their supposed national characteristics, behave as might be expected while the third, even more faithful to his homeland, yet surprises and amuses everyone. Kipling’s three soldiers were Irish, North Country and Cockney, and speaking their several dialects (reproduced in rather wearisome phonetics) they tell stories of their exploits in and out of barracks. Whether or not these stories were actually suggested to Kipling by soldiers’ talk is not known, but it is certain that they could have been, for they are based on just such anecdotes as might have been heard

in the cantonments and canteens of India at any time since our first forces arrived in the country and will be repeated until the departure of the very last “troopship that’s leaving Bombay.” And in these early examples they are little more than that. They have a certain vitality as though the author so enjoyed writing them that he breathed life into them as he chuckled over his own phrases. But they have none of the rich sympathy which came to raise Kipling’s future tales of these heroes far above the commonplace.

Isolated from the rest of Kipling’s work and re-read to-day the stories in *Plain Tales from the Hills* are not very impressive. They are clipped and scrappy as is natural enough in work collected from newspapers. It was their familiarity which recommended them in India, and the strangeness of their atmosphere, so artlessly conveyed, which made them popular in England. What is most interesting if they are to be considered critically now is the choice of theme. From what skeleton incident or situation did Kipling mould these tales? Shorn of all that made them stories, whittled down to a crude summary, they leave the impression that they must have been built up from fragments of legend or gossip exchanged at balls and picnics, clubs and mess-tables in the gay Indian ‘Eighties. This may be an injustice to Kipling and the very likeliness of the things, if he invented them, be their virtue. Here are the first dozen of them :

A mission-trained hill-man’s daughter reverting to type when betrayed by a European.

A wife who arrives unexpectedly at a dance looking magnificent and snatches her own husband back from the clutches of Mrs. Hauksbee.

A boy brought up to the sheltered life at home who commits suicide out of sheer sensitiveness in India.

A police officer so efficient at impersonating Indians that he gets work as his fiancée's groom.

A tea-planter who married a hill-girl.

A man who proposes to the wrong one of two sisters in the darkness of a dust-storm.

Mrs. Hauksbee rescuing a subaltern from Mrs. Reiver for the sake of the boy's fiancée.

Three privates who get an important visitor out of the way to avoid a parade for him.

A Goanese who quells a riot because of his love for an Anglo-Indian girl and "the White drop in his veins."

A deliberate plot to make a spiteful colonel's wife jealous without cause.

A married woman who goes to meet her old lover and finds him dead in the back of a *tonga*.

A bundle of secret Government papers delivered to the wrong hands by mistake and used for blackmail.

Out of these, and things like them, Kipling made his first stories. And the acclamation they earned was not for the promise in them but for what seemed to readers at that time their actual achievement. It became fashionable to speak of Kipling as a writer who had grown to full stature in a night. How mistaken was this conception he was very soon to prove.

CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY NOVELS

SEVERAL critics, reviewing Kipling's early work from a safe distance, have produced theories to account for his next development—*The Light that Failed*. Dixon Scott, whose essay *The Meekness of Mr. Rudyard Kipling* was published before the First World War but remains one of the most penetrating interpretations of Kipling's genius, says, "Even the dabs of deprecation, the raps from the falling rocket-sticks, perversely whipped him in the same direction. 'You can write these little tales,' said we, 'but are you knowing enough to write long ones?' He did *not* know enough: he was never meant to be a novelist; but even less was he adapted for turning the other cheek to taunts: he set his teeth, took up the challenge, tugged the mask a little more tightly, and produced *The Light that Failed*. It did fail: and the critics who had really provoked it had their moment of mean triumph."

Edward Shanks, who is usually less understanding of Kipling, comes nearer the mark perhaps. "I do not believe," he writes in the chapter called "The First Maturity" in his *Rudyard Kipling: A Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, "that Kipling ever really wanted to write this story or that he enjoyed writing it or that he was satisfied with it when it was done. His own remarks on it at the end of his life are rather of an exculpatory nature. I guess, though of

course it must be understood that this is no more than a guess, that he felt that at this stage in his career he ought to write a novel, that the feeling was converted into a serious temptation by an offer from a magazine and that he was committed to the enterprise before he had given it much thought."

I cannot see that either of these explanations is necessary. Kipling had found that he could write stories. He had an idea for this book. Why should there have been more to it than that? The power of self-criticism is rare in writers and almost unknown in very young ones. How could Kipling know that he was not, at that time, able to write a fine and mature full-length novel? It must have seemed to him that there was scarcely anything he could not do with words. Extrinsic circumstances may have made him undertake this rather than a blank verse epic or a play. But I daresay that he felt capable of either.

Nor is the book such a failure as these theories seem to imply. Kipling had at that time something that I can only describe as a lust for narrative, and it carried him through the difficult places and persuaded his reader to follow him. He started with the stark framework of a rigid plot to which his characters were forced to conform, and this meant so much twisting and welding that the book has some of the ugliness and unnaturalness of steel scaffolding. But the work was done thoroughly and with enthusiasm, and although we are frequently ill-at-ease as we examine it, it is never quite shoddy and only occasionally artificial.

The story is of a young artist of genius who forms a childhood attachment to a girl, with whom he suffers under Mrs. Jennett, the Auntie Rosa of "Baa Baa Black Sheep." (Kipling seems to have liked this rather sickly notion of a

boy-and-girl love which haunts a strong man until it is resumed in later life, and used it again in "The Brushwood Boy.") The artist has phenomenal success, meets the girl again, and then goes blind. The girl fails him in this crisis and he gets himself killed in the Soudan.

The trouble with this was not so much that it was a plot for a short story as that it could not all be treated with Kipling's expert objectivity. In writing a novel he could scarcely carry a man through the fears of approaching blindness and the horrors of blindness itself, objectively. As long as Kipling was able to do so he was on safe ground, his own observant self with all those telling little details that make his pictures so much more than snapshots. "He paced up and down the studio quietly at first, but afterwards with the hurried feet of fear." "They came into the studio, rejoicing, to be welcomed over-effusively by a drawn, lined, shrunk, haggard wreck—unshaven, blue-white about the nostrils, stooping in the shoulders, and peering under his eyebrows nervously." And on the night when he actually loses the remains of his sight :

It was then that Torpenhow heard his name called by a voice he did not know—in the rattling accents of deadly fear.

Torpenhow held the candle within a foot of Dick's eyes, but there was no light in those eyes. He lit the gas, and Dick heard the flame catch. The grip of his fingers on Torpenhow's shoulder made Torpenhow wince.

This is good, so good in its "rattling accents" and in the sound of the gas being lit, that it is awkward to turn to the rigmaroles of emotion and analysis which Kipling allows himself to voice when he deals with the tragedy subjectively.

"When she finds that I don't write she'll stop writing. It's better so. I couldn't be any use to her now," Dick argued, and

the tempter suggested that he should make known his condition. Every nerve in him revolted. "I have fallen low enough already. I'm not going to beg for pity. Besides, it would be cruel to her." He strove to put Maisie out of his thoughts ; but the blind have many opportunities for thinking, and as the tides of his strength came back to him in the long employless days of dead darkness, Dick's soul was troubled to the core. Another letter, and another, came from Maisie. Then there was silence, and Dick sat by the window, the pulse of summer in the air, and pictured her being won by another man, stronger than himself. His imagination, the keener for the dark background it worked against, spared him no single detail that might send him raging up and down the studio, to stumble over the stove that seemed to be in four places at once. Worst of all, tobacco would not taste in the darkness. The arrogance of the man had disappeared, and in its place were settled despair that Torpenhow knew, and blind passion that Dick confided to his pillow at night. The intervals between the paroxysms were filled with intolerable waiting and the weight of intolerable darkness.

But Kipling drives on. There is something almost sublime in his own unconsciousness of his inadequacy for this. The thoughts of an artist gone blind ? Of course he could do it ! And he nearly does. So nearly that if one reads lazily or hurriedly one is almost rushed into belief. Such is his temerity that only after a few minutes, and then perhaps by a single phrase, is one brought up short, realising that it is all a trick. He so nearly succeeds that his failure, once perceived, is the more humiliating :

It is hard to live alone in the dark, confusing the day and night ; dropping to sleep through sheer weariness at midday, and rising restless in the chill of dawn. At first Dick, on his awakenings, would grope along the corridors of the chambers till he heard some one snore. Then he would know that the day had not yet come, and return wearily to his bedroom. Later he learned not to stir till there was a noise and movement

in the house and Mr. Beeton advised him to get up. Once dressed—and dressing, now that Torpenhow was away, was a lengthy business, because collars, ties, and the like, hid themselves in far corners of the room, and search meant head-beating against chairs and trunks—once dressed, there was nothing whatever to do except to sit still and brood till the three daily meals came. Centuries separated breakfast from lunch, and lunch from dinner, and though a man prayed for hundreds of years that his mind might be taken from him, God would never hear. Rather the mind was quickened and the revolving thoughts ground against each other as millstones grind when there is no corn between; and yet the brain would not wear out and give him rest. It continued to think, at length, with imagery and all manner of reminiscences. It recalled Maisie and past success, reckless travels by land and sea, the glory of doing work and feeling that it was good, and suggested all that might have happened had the eyes only been faithful to their duty. When thinking ceased through sheer weariness, there poured into Dick's soul tide on tide of overwhelming, purposeless fear—dread of starvation always, terror lest the unseen ceiling should crush down upon him, fear of fire in the chambers and a louse's death in red flame, and agonies of fiercer horror that had nothing to do with any fear of death. Then Dick bowed his head, and clutching the arms of his chair fought with his sweating self till the tinkle of plates told him that something to eat was being set before him.

There are small gaucheries in the book and more than once it goes screeching down into melodrama and embarrassing sentimentality. But it has a quality which some of the worst novels and all of the best have—that animation which comes from the author's own belief in his creation. Dick Heldar may be a one-dimensional projection of Kipling's own desires and fears, Maisie is the flattest of pasteboard and Torpenhow is labelled "faithful friend" in such crude letters that one can never overlook them to see whether the man exists or not. But with his—"I can do it. You watch.

Here they go," Kipling carries the three of them through the story, and if one hears a faint gasp of auctorial triumph in the last paragraphs of the book, one does not begrudge it.

The other novel of this period is less interesting structurally, though because it does not attempt so much it is less open to criticism. *The Naulahka* is a story of the adventures of an American man and girl in a small state of Rajputana. This Kipling wrote in collaboration with his brother-in-law Wolcott Balestier.

The theme is tawdry enough. Kate Sheriff in her new American town of Topaz becomes convinced that it is her duty to nurse some of the needy women of India, and Nick Tarvin, in a series of rather tiresome arguments, during which he addresses Kate as "little girl," tries in vain to dissuade her. She leaves for Rhatore and Tarvin follows her in order to obtain the state jewel of Rhatore, the Naulahka, with which he hopes to soften the heart of the wife of an American railroad President so that she will persuade her husband to make his new line pass through the town of Topaz. He eventually gets and loses the Naulahka, but succeeds in persuading Kate (for whose ministrations the Indian women show little enthusiasm) to return with him to America. The book unhappily ends before he has to make his explanations to the lady in America waiting for the state jewel.

On that framework Kipling and his collaborator hang their tale, and it must be admitted that for the most part the two are matched. There are a number of rasping faults of taste, even of accuracy. Thus, while Nick Tarvin's phrases are turned in good colloquial American the girl speaks always with the stilted diction of the heroine in an English novel of the time, as though her own language

would have been a little unladylike. Nick Tarvin and the girl are both sticks, the former a mere peg on which Kipling hangs his impressions of an Indian State, the latter a colourless, characterless, petticoated intention-to-go-and-nurse-Indians. The early chapters are frankly boring and the climax is patently contrived, skimmed and unnatural.

And yet, there are things in the book which only Kipling could have done, and moments of distinctness and distinction which are truly his. It was, after all, an adventure story, published six years after Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and in the days when Anthony Hope and Conan Doyle were turning out one after another of that species of thriller in which the interest lies only in the hero's ability to overcome the most ingeniously invented dangers. But there are episodes even in this cobbled story which raise it far out of its class.

One whole long chapter is given to Nick Tarvin's lonely visit to a deserted city, and as Kipling swings into this piece of direct narrative we feel the authentic breathlessness and wonder that he rouses at his best. Nick Tarvin becomes a horseman—we forget the feeble outline created by the previous chapters. There are several deserted cities in India, and it is likely that Kipling knew Fatehpur Sikri, the greatest of them as well as perhaps Bassein, not far from Bombay. But his Gunnar is more terrible and more vivid than any reality, and Nick's exploration of it gives chills and fevers to the reader. The climax, when he has found the Cow's Mouth, the sacred spring, is hair-raising :

The match showed him that he had quitted the passage, and was standing in a black space of unknown dimensions. He fancied that he saw the outline of a pillar, or rows of pillars, flickering drunkenly in the gloom, and was all too sure that

the ground beneath him was strewn with bones. Then he became aware of pale emerald eyes watching him fixedly, and perceived that there was deep breathing in the place other than his own. He flung the match down, the eyes retreated, there was a wild rattle and crash in the darkness, a howl, that might have been bestial or human, and Tarvin, panting between the tree roots, swung himself to the left, and fled back over the mud-banks to the ledge, where he stood, his back to the Cow's Mouth and his revolver in his hand. In that moment of waiting for what might emerge from the hole in the side of the tank, Tarvin tasted all the agonies of pure physical terror. Then he noted with the tail of his eye that a length of mud-bank to his left—half the mud-bank, in fact—was moving slowly into the water. It floated slowly across the tank, a long welt of filth and slime. Nothing came out of the hole between the fig-tree roots, but the mud-bank grounded under the ledge almost at Tarvin's feet, and opened horny eyelids, heavy with green slime.

The Western man is familiar with many strange things, but the alligator does not come within the common range of his experiences. A second time Tarvin moved from point to point without being able to explain the steps he took to that end. He found himself sitting in the sunshine at the head of the slippery path that led downwards. His hands were full of the wholesome jungle grass and the clean dry dust. He could see the dead city about him, and he felt that it was home.

The Cow's Mouth chuckled and choked out of sight as it had chuckled since the making of the tank, and that was at the making of time. A man, old, crippled and all but naked, came through the high grass leading a little kid, and calling mechanically from time to time, "*Ao, Bhai ! Ao !*" "*Come, brother ! Come !*" Tarvin marvelled first at his appearance on earth at all, and next that he could so unconcernedly descend the path to the darkness and the horror below.

It is notable again in this book that while Kipling was as yet unable to make the main actors in his story breathe and have their being he could sketch in the minor characters most ably. Static they may be, mere figures in the back-

ground if you like, but beautifully drawn. Here there is Sitabhai, the gypsy who had become the Maharajah's second wife, the Maharajah himself and his little son, and the Woman of the Desert.

Kipling's reputation was now considerable, in America as well as in England and India. During the next eight years, in fact, three books on his work were published—Richard le Gallienne's *Rudyard Kipling: A Criticism*; G. F. Monkshood's *Rudyard Kipling: An Attempt at Appreciation*, and *A Kipling Primer* by the American anthologist Frederic Lawrence Knowles. But his renown at this time was out of proportion to his achievements. If his work had ended with *The Naulahka* there would have been nothing in it but promise, and we should still be perplexed at yet another of the bubble reputations which swell and burst from time to time. But he was about to enter on the decade in which his most solid achievements lay.

CHAPTER V

SHORT STORIES

KIPLING had suffered only the briefest period of appeal to the highbrows—who were not yet called highbrows—and was now a literary demagogue. During the 'Nineties, his most prolific time, he was almost the Voice of the People, which is a strange thing considering that nearly all he wrote was set in outlandish places and sprinkled with Hindustani. He was a best-seller, a public figure, a sort of institution, though in his own life he—as the people of Burwash say about him to this day—kept himself to himself. He seems to have been remarkably indifferent to the literary movements and cliques and tendencies of the time (the *Savoy* and the *Yellow Book*, Wilde and Beardsley might have belonged to another age), while he showed no influence from other writers, popular or esoteric. There he was with his stories, his countless good stories from India and America and London, and he seemed content to sit down and write them without a glance over his shoulder. Only he was no longer learning or experimenting, trying to give an impression or hoping to conceal inexperience. He knew now. He knew what to do and how to do it. He had learnt self-confidence though he was still as eager and enthusiastic as in his first newspaper sketch.

It was in these years that he came to power, for besides three novels and the two *Jungle Books* and a great deal of

poetry he published before the turn of the century no less than five collections of short stories. *Life's Handicap* (1891), *Wee Willie Winkie, etc.* (1892), *Many Inventions* (1893), *Soldiers Three* (1895), *The Day's Work* (1898); these are as his English publishers issued them. Several of them were made up of two or three smaller collections which had already been issued in India, and imported into England in paper-backed editions. As there is nothing but internal evidence to indicate the precise order in which they were written they may as well be taken in their collected form.

In these five books there are eighty short stories (apart from the Gadsby dialogues). Of these, sixty-four are set for the most part in India, and of these in turn thirteen concern Privates Mulvaney, Ortheris and Learoyd. Every story in the first two collections has an Indian background. From India he had learnt something more than plots—a personal philosophy, or perhaps I should say a way of looking at life, which gave a certain unconscious bias to his work. Unconscious because whatever Kipling may have been as a man or as a poet, as a story-teller he was not a propagandist. He was far too intent on the story, too determined to interpret truthfully and surely the people he knew and the things he had seen, to proselytise. But he had sympathies and prejudices which were perceptible in all that he wrote, and they have been codified by others, never by Kipling, into a creed. At the most they gave him a point of view.

His sympathies and prejudices, again, were by no means eccentric, or even original. They were those of his age, so much so that for a time he found himself speaking for the common man, making the people articulate. The people changed more quickly than he did, and remaining constant to his ideals he was soon branded as an imperialist, a jingoist,

a Tory die-hard. In fact, as a writer, he was none of these things. He was an Englishman brought up in India or among the sons of Englishmen from India, who had seen his race ruling another, and, as he believed, a less competent, people. And this promotion of the dynamic over the inefficient, this elevation of the right man, the able man, to authority, became in his mind a sort of working pattern for the organisation of mankind.

He had seen England from afar, he had heard her called "home" by men who had scarcely visited her, he had read her poets. He had seen the English tradition kept alive by a few thousand white men among hundreds of millions of Indians. He had watched the youngsters from the English public schools come out and tackle the exasperating tasks of government with courage and a sense of justice. And he believed—and was right in believing—that those young men in the last century, for all their consciousness of class and class-privilege, were for the most part honourable, idealistic, virile, likeable. He had seen the Indian using his age-old gift of making someone else feel responsible for him, had heard some grizzled sepoy telling a beardless subaltern that the sahib was his "father and mother" and must certainly assist him in securing justice in the matter of the land which his brother had stolen. He had watched all his life the miracle of his fellow-countrymen controlling in India a fifth of the world's population to whom they stood in a proportion of one to forty thousand.

So he had formed prejudices—in favour of law and order, of a ruling caste, or at least of rulers, in favour of men of his own race whom he never ceased to consider the flower of the world, in favour of government by a strong minority which, however, should hold the Law as more sacred than

its own authority, in favour of soldiers who made the Law prevail. As you read his tales you will feel these prejudices, you will catch the sound of here a chuckle and there a sigh from the author himself, but you will never be directly asked to share them. For whatever his point of view may have been Kipling was too great an artist to let it give him a squint as he examined the world about which he wrote. As the story came before psychology, so it came before his private sympathies.

India was—to use an old-fashioned but adequate word—his inspiration. It was what he saw and believed of India which made him an Imperialist. His view was the conventional, and at the time the almost inevitable, one. The educated Indian was no more than the descendant of those first few intelligent “natives” who had been sent to school by the East India Company so that they could keep the Company’s accounts. The Princes were picturesque feudal lords who had to be watched and checked by the British. The soldiers were lovable children, brave beyond words in battle, but needing the guidance of British officers. The workers were shiftless, recalcitrant, humorous animals. The whole country had to be saved from famine, disease and violence by the efforts of the British who suffered in the work, but who accepted the responsibility and gave their lives to its burden. It was a country of great beauty, of rich and satisfying artistic effects, yet with a suggestion of the grotesque in its beauty. It was a place, above all, which tested the young men sent out from England to rule and protect it, a place where a man might attain to greatness or sink to infamy in a shorter time than anywhere else.

He believed that he understood the people of the country. He loved them, but as a man loves children, and in his books

he made them perform and grin and salaam as a man might train his progeny to do. He had a certain uncanny insight into the oriental mind, but he could only look into the dark eyes at the darker places behind them, never out of those eyes towards the light. He had, in other words, an Englishman's understanding of the Indian, carried no doubt to the *n*th degree, but still an Englishman's. Never for a moment could he see the world as the Indian did. It would never have occurred to him that this country belonged rightfully to the people whom his friends the officers and governors held in sway.

He treats it as a matter of course. He makes no allowance for the reader who does not share his view. "We of the ruling people," he seems to say to his reader, "we understand." It is a confiding, friendly address, but it is irritating to hear now. He does not try to win you, he assumes from the first that you are with him.

As, for a time, his audience was. For all his confidence and his man-to-man certitude, Kipling must have been a little startled to find that in merely speaking as he had always spoken in India, he was voicing, in England, the national sentiments of the day. There was a reaction to the Liberalism of Gladstone. Home Rule for Ireland had failed as a policy, and Home Rule for India was as yet unthinkable. As the century neared its end Kipling's voice was taken for that of a Roman augur warning the Empire of the growing power of the Goths. What had been the inarticulate feeling of every Englishman in Simla became a positive doctrine in London. And though he did no more than show off his friends in his books, and point to their merits, and express what I have called his prejudice in their favour, he was soon labelled.

The label was a splendid thing while it was popular. But the Boer War came and the new century and the Old Queen died and there was talk of democracy and the rights of man, and as suddenly as he had been mistaken for a mouthpiece Kipling found himself a voice crying in the wilderness. But during the decade of the 'Nineties, and particularly in these five books of short stories, his prejudices were the people's, his sentiments the Empire's.

Meanwhile he was, I must repeat, concerned chiefly, if not entirely, with telling his stories, and telling them well. They were changing from the newspaper fill-ups, the snappy trifles of *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and lengthening into beautifully proportioned little novels which existed in their own right.

Any collection of short stories must be uneven. For whereas in a novel a patch of poor quality may fade into the general tissue, in this it will stand out four-square as a shoddy tale. It is hard, in the book called *Wee Willie Winkie*, to stomach the inclusion of the sickening little story that gives the collection its name printed beside the immortal "Man who Would be King," the former a sentimental account of a small boy bringing an officer and a girl together, the latter a grim and glorious narrative of a great red-haired deserter who crowns himself monarch of a forgotten Himalayan community.

But the next collection, *Many Inventions*, contains much of Kipling's most characteristic and most enduring work. He is no longer satisfied with the merely exciting, the merely bizarre or the merely comic. He is interested in people as people and not as chessmen moved to make a surprise ending or a clever twist in the plot. In this there is "The Disturber of Traffic," that humorous yet oddly realistic study of a

lighthouse-keeper in the Dutch East Indies who is driven mad by watching the streakiness of the sea.

The streaks, they would run with the tides, north and south, twice a day, accordin' to them currents, and he'd lie down on the planking—it was a screw-pile Light—with his eyes to a crack and watch the water streaking through the piles just so quiet as hogwash. He said the only comfort he got was at slack water. Then the streaks in his head went round and round like a sampan in a tide-rip ; but that was heaven, he said, to the other kind of streaks—the straight ones that looked like arrows on a wind-chart, but much more regular, and that was the trouble of it. No more he couldn't ever keep his eyes off the tides that ran up and down so strong, but as soon as ever he looked at the high hills standing all along Flores Strait for rest and comfort his eyes would be pulled down like to the nesty streaky water ; and when they once got there he couldn't pull them away again till the tide changed. He told me all this himself, speaking just as though he was talking of somebody else.

There is also that remarkable piece of virtuosity, "A Matter of Fact," from which I have already quoted—the story of a sea-serpent seen by a number of journalists. There is "In the Rukh," in which he first introduces Mowgli of the Jungle Books, and there is that piece of epic fooling, "Brugglesmith." There is a plucky attempt—the only one Kipling ever made—to write a London slum story, "The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot." And finally, "The Children of the Zodiac," which might so easily *not* have come off, but which does.

Then, after *Soldiers Three*, which was made up of earlier material, came, as late as 1898, *The Day's Work*. Though its stories are set in three continents, Kipling is here most fluent and at home, for he is writing of the daily labour of other men (and of animals and machines), a theme in which

he always took delight. He has mastered each of them, down to the most abstruse technical detail, yet it is unfair to say that he parades his knowledge. He writes as one expert to another, with a cheerful assumption of his reader's interest and understanding, in much the same way as he assumes the reader's sympathy for empire-building. In "The Bridge Builders," for instance, he not only writes of the making of a Ganges bridge as though he had been personally employed on it, but shows that he had a profound knowledge of the complicated mythology of the Hindus. But he never lectures, he seems to suppose that everyone understands exactly why early rains and "floods on the Ramgunga" might be fatal to the piers "twenty-four feet in diameter, capped with red Agra stone," and what Hitchcock means when he says, "Pontoon, one big pontoon with the overhead crane on it. T'other overhead crane on the mended pontoon, with the cart-road rivets from Twenty to Twenty-three piers—two construction lines, and a turning-spur. The pilework must take its chance." Also when Kali and Hanuman and other figures from the Hindu pantheon hold their Punchayet, the reader is not bored by any introduction to them, and so accepts their presence and characters. Of ships in "The Ship that Found Herself," and "The Devil and the Deep Sea," horses in "A Walking Delegate," of locomotives in "007," of shipping in "Bread upon the Waters" he shows, but never shows off, the same keen knowledge.

He was reaching out in all directions for settings and subjects—only his characters remain unchanged. Bobby Wick in "Only a Subaltern," Chinn in "The Tomb of his Ancestors" and Georgie Cottar in "The Brushwood Boy" are all the same clean and decent young man loved by the

rank-and-file and too ingenuous to know why. And who can distinguish Miriam of "The Brushwood Boy" from William of "William the Conqueror"?

But the stories in which Kipling was most happy—in all these five books—are those of his three friends, Privates Mulvaney, Learoyd and Ortheris. His soldiers three had long ceased to be merely an Irishman, a Yorkshireman and a Cockney, to be distinguished by their several dialects and a few adjectives applied to their persons. They were human beings, intimately known to the reader and greatly loved. This was something more than mere characterisation, it brought Kipling as near to Pygmalion as any writer could come—he had created the men.

There is a moment in *The Light that Failed* worth recalling here. It is when Torpenhow takes Dick Helder, who has lately gone blind, to the park and tells him that the Guards are on parade.

"Let's get nearer. They're in column, aren't they?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Felt it. Oh, my men!—my beautiful men!" He edged forward as though he could see. "I could draw those chaps once. Who'll draw 'em now?"

"They'll move off in a minute. Don't jump when the band begins."

"Huh! I'm not a new charger. It's the silences that hurt. Nearer, Torp!—nearer! Oh, my God, what wouldn't I give to see 'em for a minute!—one half-minute!"

It might be Kipling speaking. "I could draw those chaps once." And he could. The soldier in India in the 'Eighties whom he celebrated in *Barrack Room Ballads* and immortalised in these thirteen stories became something very much more than an unfortunate man who had preferred a red coat and the Queen's shilling to ill-paid industry

or long hours of work on the land, more than a phenomenon or a type, such as he seemed to his contemporaries. He became in Kipling's hands one of the most lively of the creatures of fiction.

Mulvaney, the big grizzled Irishman, almost time-expired, who but for one brief spell of glory as a corporal had remained a private for all his twenty years of service, was the chief of them, and his humour and sentimentality, his childish cunning, his great-heartedness and volubility are delightful. But it is Learoyd, the gigantic simpleton from Yorkshire, who tells perhaps the most moving and revealing of the stories, "On Greenhow Hill." He is with difficulty persuaded to narrative, and once launched tells with great honesty of purpose why he joined the army—answering a question which must have existed for most of the men who earned "a shilling a day." Speaking of the religious sect with whom he was entangled in the story he voices something which seemed to cut deep with Kipling for it recurs in one form or another in several of his poems and tales :

"And now I come to think on it, one at strangest things I know is 'at they couldn't abide th' thought o' soldiering. There's a vast o' fightin' i' th' Bible, and there's a deal of Methodists i' th' army ; but to hear chapel folk talk yo'd think that soldierin' were next door, an' t'other side, to hangin'. I' their meetin's all their talk is o' fightin'. When Sammy Strother were stuck for summat to say in his prayers, he'd sing out, 'Th' sword o' th' Lord and o' Gideon.' They were allus at it about puttin' on th' whole armour o' righteousness, an' fightin' the good fight o' faith. And then, atop o' 't all, they held a prayer-meetin' ower a young chap as wanted to 'list, and nearly deafened him, till he picked up his hat and fair ran away. And they'd tell tales in th' Sunday-school o' bad lads as had been thumped and brayed for bird-nesting o' Sundays and playin' truant o' week-days, and how they took to wrestlin',

dog-fightin', rabbit-runnin', and drinkin', till at last, as if 'twere a hepitaph on a gravestone, they damned him across th' moors wi', 'an' then he went and 'listed for a soldier,' an' they'd all fetch a deep breath, and throw up their eyes like a hen drinkin'."

"Fwhy is ut?" said Mulvaney, bringing down his hand on his thigh with a crack. "In the name av God, fwhy is ut? I've seen ut, tu. They cheat an' they swindle an' they lie an' they slander, an' fifty things fifty times worse; but the last an' the worst by their reckonin' is to serve the Widdy honest. It's like the talk av childer—seein' things all round."

"Plucky lot of fightin' good fights of whatsername they'd do if we didn't see they had a quiet place to fight in. And such fightin' as theirs is! Cats on the tiles. T'other callin' to which to come on. I'd give a month's pay to get some o' them broad-backed beggars in London sweatin' through a day's road-makin' an' a night's rain. They'd carry on a deal afterwards—same as we're supposed to carry on. I've bin turned out of a measly arf-license pub down Lambeth way, full o' greasy kebmen, 'fore now," said Ortheris with an oath.

"Maybe you were dhrunk," said Mulvaney soothingly.

"Worse nor that. The Forders were drunk. *I* was wearin' the Queen's uniform."

It will be seen that the other two of the trio take up the complaint according to their lights. It may be that Kipling had an exaggerated notion of the civilian's contempt for the soldier at the time, but certainly that contempt existed. In portraying these three men he was deliberately answering it, but never by attempting to whitewash his heroes. They had all the sins of the licentious soldiery. But he loved them. And better than openly pleading their cause he made them lovable to his readers.

CHAPTER VI

THE JUNGLE BOOKS

AND now Kipling made what so many writers have desired and created—a world of his own in which the laws of probability were of his own choosing. Swift, Butler, Anatole France, Cabell, James Stephens are but a few of the story-tellers who have demanded an escape from the tiresome inhibitions imposed by space and time and the common understanding of cause and effect. Kipling created a Jungle in which there was Law and even Order, in which the animals, while conscientiously retaining certain of the habits of their kind, spoke and loved and obeyed as humans.

There were precedents enough for this giving of logic and speech to the beasts, from Æsop to Kenneth Grahame. But Kipling's is the most interesting of them all. With a human boy reared by wolves as his protagonist he makes the best of both worlds. Mowgli is Man and all our sympathy is with him. We watch his exploits with a fond identification of ourselves with a literary hero such as few writers since Cervantes or Fielding have been able to inspire.

The idea of the Jungle Books had other advantages for Kipling. The psychology was of necessity most primitive. The beasts were beastly, each in his own fashion, the man was manly and the woman, Messua, was womanly. He

could have his types now and no one could gainsay him. A simple adjective would do to distinguish the characters of each creature, and these need never develop or react except in the simplest and most direct way.

But if he played with the laws of nature, making Baloo the bear a teacher and Kaa the serpent a friend, and all the animals talkative and obedient to the Jungle Law, he imposed certain other restrictions on his fancy which made the liberties he took with fact seem reasonable, and produced an effect of strict reality. There is none of the nonsense with which other writers have humanised the beasts—they do not live in little houses or use human utensils or eat human food or follow human habits. They remain beasts, and it is faintly shocking, though perfectly in keeping with the whole conception, that they should speak of the day's kill, instead of, like the three bears in another fairy-tale, eating their bowls of porridge. There is nothing of Tiger Tim or of Donald Duck about the creatures Kipling made. They keep their terrible powers and their natural desires, being only gifted with certain extra qualities of logic and loyalty, being, like other characters in less imaginary stories, a little larger than life. Their sentiments and emotions are the elemental ones—Mowgli's love for his foster-parents and foster-brothers, the pride of Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther in their brilliant pupil, the treachery of Shere Khan the tiger and so on. But they seem quite inevitable, as one reads. The whole convention is accepted from the moment when Father Wolf rescues Mowgli, then "a naked brown baby who could just walk," from Shere Khan.

That convention, in its fundamentally scrupulous fidelity to natural laws, gave the fullest scope to Kipling's craving

for correct detail. Of the ways of wild creatures and of human beings in wild places he had perhaps learnt much from his father, but it is the quiet and certain manner in which he reveals his knowledge, never delaying but always enriching the story, never lecturing or showing off yet always ready to outline some hazy patch of background with a few clever strokes, which gives to these stories a reality which would be remarkable in an account of the everyday life of familiar people. "The camel doubled up camel-fashion like a two-foot rule, and sat down whimpering." "A big brown fruit-eating bat brushed past his ear; a porcupine's quills rattled in the thicket, and in the darkness between the tree-stems he heard a hog-bear digging hard in the moist warm earth, and snuffing as it digged." "He met with more adventures than can be told, and narrowly escaped being caught by the basking shark, and the spotted shark and the hammerhead, and he met all the untrustworthy ruffians that loaf up and down the seas; and the heavy polite fish, and the scarlet spotted scallops that are moored in one place for hundreds of years, and grow very proud of it; but he never met Sea Cow, and he never found an island that he could fancy." "'Good. Begins now the dance—the Dance of the Hunger of Kaa. Sit still and watch.' He turned twice or thrice in a big circle, weaving his head from right to left. Then he began making loops and figures of eight with his body, and soft, oozy triangles that melted into squares and five-sided figures, and coiled mounds, never resting, never hurrying, and never stopping his low humming song. It grew darker and darker, till at last the dragging, shifting coils disappeared, but they could hear the rustle of the scales." "He crawled back over the huddled dogs, dusted the dry snow from his furs with the whalebone

beater that Amoraq kept by the door, tapped the skin-lined roof of the house to shake off any icicles that might have fallen from the dome of snow above, and curled up on the bench. The dogs in the passage snored and whined in their sleep, the boy-baby in Amoraq's deep fur hood kicked and choked and gurgled, and the mother of the newly named puppy lay at Kotuko's side, her eyes fixed on the bundle of sealskin, warm and safe above the broad yellow flame of the lamp."

The growth of these books is as visible a thing as the growth of Mowgli himself, and Kipling seems to have scorned any kind of revision or excision which would have made it less obvious. He is never at pains to hide his own way of developing from his initial intent; he never gives a false finish to his work. The earliest reference to Mowgli was in a short story, "In the Rukh," which appeared not in the *Jungle Books* at all but in *Many Inventions*. This was published as a collection in book form in June 1893, a year before *The Jungle Book*, and the particular story may have first been written before that. "In the Rukh" is about a certain Gisborne of the Indian Forestry Service who loses a forest guard by a man-eating tiger and going to the place of the kill gets his first introduction to Mowgli :

A man was walking down the dried bed of the stream, naked except for the loin-cloth, but crowned with a wreath of the tasselled blossoms of the white convolvulus creeper. So noiselessly did he move over the little pebbles, that even Gisborne, used to the soft-footedness of trackers, started.

"The tiger that killed," he began, without any salute, "has gone to drink, and now he is asleep under a rock beyond that hill." His voice was clear and bell-like, utterly different from the usual whine of the native, and his face as he lifted it in the

sunshine might have been that of an angel strayed among the woods.

This Mowgli *could* have developed from the idealised wolf-boy of the Jungle Books, there is no absolute inconsistency between the two. Clearly Kipling having written "In the Rukh" as a short story wanted to return to his theme and to picture the subject of it in boyhood. He did so, but frankly as a fairy-tale, showing Mowgli as he wished him to be and not as he appeared to forestry officials. But there is a further development. The first story in *The Jungle Book*, "Mowgli's Brothers," carried some of the usual phraseology of a tale addressed to children. Father and Mother Wolf are almost relatives of Brer Fox, and although the Law of the Jungle is in being and the pack is howling, there are such direct addresses to childhood as: "Now you must be content to skip ten or eleven whole years, and only guess at all the wonderful life that Mowgli led among the wolves, because if it were written out it would fill ever so many books." As Kipling became more involved in the bloody destinies of his wild animals the stories grew more adult, till he reaches "The Spring Running," that subtle study in adolescence. But did Cervantes know where Don Quixote would lead him, or had Kipling's contemporary, Galsworthy, any notion of his saga when he wrote a short novel called *The Man of Property* about a certain Soames Forsyte who felt that he should own his wife?

Even in these tales Kipling cannot hide his respect for law and order, for man ruling his world, and the white man giving justice to the rest. "'But,' said the charcoal-burners, 'what would happen if the English heard of it?' The English, they had heard, were a perfectly mad people,

who would not let honest farmers kill witches in peace." And when Messua is threatened by her village people :

" Khaniwara is thirty miles from here, but at Khaniwara we may find the English—— "

" And what Pack are they ? " said Mowgli.

" I do not know. They be white, and it is said that they govern all the land, and do not suffer people to burn or beat each other without witness. If we can get thither to-night, we live. Otherwise we die ! "

This should not be called propaganda. To Kipling it was commonplace. He could have argued—and not without truth—that so would have spoken any Indian villager in Messua's place, and he records her words quite simply. He is again more interested in telling his story than in making out a case, and what seems to us now sly flattery for his fellow-countrymen rather unnecessarily inserted was to him, I think, as natural a part of the tale as Buldeo's gun. True, if we are to consider " In the Rukh " as the last story in the Mowgli sequence on the grounds that it concerned Mowgli's manhood, though it was written before the rest, we must accept the fact that he finally takes service under the British, rather as Kim, another lover of freedom who knew two worlds, did in a later book. But this can scarcely be called significant.

CHAPTER VII

“STALKY,” “CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS”

WHATEVER he may have been doing in his earlier stories, in *Stalky and Co.* Kipling was presenting actual people, many of whom must have been still alive. This gives the book a special interest because by reading the reminiscences of his two school-friends and also Kipling's own recollections of his school, we can construct a fairly clear picture of the United Services College at Westward Ho !, its staff and pupils, and make certain comparisons between fact and fiction.

Stalky himself became Major-General L. C. Dunsterville, and in *Stalky's Reminiscences* he devotes three chapters to the period, while M'Turk, whose real name was G. C. Beresford, has written a whole book called *Schooldays with Kipling*. Then there is a sketch by Kipling himself which is often forgotten by writers reconsidering his schooldays called “An English School” and included in *Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides*. There is a very lucid chapter, “The School before its Time,” in *Something of Myself*. There are the nine stories of *Stalky and Co.*¹ and four belated tales in the same setting, “Regulus” in *A Diversity of Creatures*, “The United Idolaters” and “The Propagation of Know-

¹ This was the first of the stories when they originally appeared in the *Windsor Magazine*, December 1898–June 1899.

ledge" in *Debits and Credits*, and a little sketch called "Stalky" in *Land and Sea Tales*.

There are a few inconsistencies between these, as might well be expected when it is realised that Stalky and M'Turk were writing in their sixties. Stalky says, "We were very well fed on good wholesome food," though Kipling had written in the previous year "our food would now raise a mutiny in Dartmoor," and Beresford, writing in the year before that, has several pages describing the miserable diet. But such differences are merely factual and out of all these books with their revealing illustrations, emerges a most vivid picture.

Among the staff three figures stand out—Cormell Price, the headmaster; Willes, the chaplain, known in *Stalky and Co.* as the Reverend John Gillett; and Crofts, the classics master, who is referred to by Kipling in fiction as "King" and in *Something of Myself* as "C——." It is Stalky who gives his real name for the first time in his *Reminiscences*. It is Stalky, too, who prints a group of the staff in which all three, as well as other characters from the book, are shown, and to anyone who has cared for *Stalky and Co.* it is a fascinating photograph. There is the bearded "Head" with his monocle hanging on his breast, looking what he was, a strayed pre-Raphaelite. There is "the Reverend John," corpulently good-natured, and there, unmistakable, is the energetic, sarcastic, enthusiastic "King," sitting bolt-upright with his hands self-consciously clasped and his small angry eyes fixed disdainfully on the camera.

In the same book is another group in which Kipling, then about sixteen, squats painfully, a military moustache already overspreading his lip, an absurd school cap perched on his large head and his unique spectacles on his nose. The same

figure appears in a number of professedly contemporary drawings in Beresford's book, but here also is M'Turk himself looking handsome and truculent and Stalky with the frank English face which is recognisable again in his portrait as a subaltern in the 20th Punjabis (in his own book) and even in that of the much be-ribboned Major-General Dunsterville taken when he was fifty-five.

Beresford's book gives the impression that it was spun out by some ghostly hack from the elderly M'Turk's thin recollections. It is full of such phrases as " the surreptitious perusal of fiction," " a funereal blackboard," " one who invoked the muse," " sparrows were the unfortunate spoils of a surreptitious catapult," and so on. Stalky's book has a bluff and crude manner, and is far less detailed. But from the two of them one gains a picture which gives the Kipling story a new dimension. For Kipling never dawdled to describe the College architecturally or to paint the whiskers on King's face. Kipling in *Stalky and Co.*, as elsewhere, produced his effects by allusion and suggestion rather than by long adjectival descriptions. The College building of the short stories is as visible and concrete as that of the memoirs, but it is built with a few airy phrases, not with bricks. When one comes to compare it with Beresford's " row of what seemed promising lodging-houses at Westward Ho ! near the middle of the curve of Bideford Bay," noting that there were " twelve file of fine upstanding terrace houses of five stories," one realises that Kipling had conveyed what he later called " the Feng-shui, the spirit of the house itself," while M'Turk had photographed it.

Kipling called the United Services College a " school before its Time," but it was the book and not the institution which was premature. Since Hughes had written the

unfortunate praying-in-the-dormitory scene in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, school fiction had been a matter of such goody-goody novels as *Eric, or Little by Little*, or those high-flown adventure stories written with a school background under alliterative titles which were still appearing in *Chums* in my boyhood. (I clearly remember the startling events in "The Mystery at Melford Manor" and "The Spy at Sedgemere School.") The public school as a background for realism, for studies in adolescence, for the tracing in fiction of the theories of Freud, was unknown, and *The Loom of Youth* was not published till twenty years later.

Stalky and Co. has a certain kindred with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, but although it is a supremely "healthy" book it did foresee the days when boys would be treated in fiction as human beings and not as little cardboard angels or devils in mortar-boards, it did reveal masters as—to say the least of it—human, and not as grave and godlike arbiters. In common with *Tom Brown's Schooldays* its heroes are larger than life. They are, in fact, heroes in the literary sense. They have an Olympian life-likeness, they stride across the Devonshire landscape like so many John Ridds, faithful always to their own characteristics, behaving with an almost painful consistency. But they live in the mind as no analysed creature of the later psychological school stories can ever do. It is some years since I read Alec Waugh's really powerful *Loom of Youth*, or Austin Harrison's perfervid *Lifting Mist*, but although each of these impressed me in youth I cannot remember a single character from them, and I believe that this is true of most readers. Whereas *Stalky*, *Beetle*, *M'Turk*, *King*, little *Hartopp* and "the Head" are as real to me as the schoolboys and masters of my own boyhood. And this although Kipling never paused to write a line of straight

description, and the only hint to be gathered about his heroes' appearances is the fact that Beetle wore spectacles.

Once more, in these stories, Kipling was not afraid to develop as he wrote, to allow his approach to undergo a change. " King " of " In Ambush," the first of the Stalky stories, is a " zealous hater of Stalky and Co." who shouts, " Go on, Sergeant ! " to Foxy in a crisis, and " leers triumphantly " because he mistakes " undried tears of mirth " for the boys' misery. Later, he becomes the devoted classicist of " Regulus," and the true lover of literature of " The Propagation of Knowledge," while in *Something of Myself* he is fondly if somewhat curiously referred to as " my old Classic master."

Two years before these " tracts or parables on the education of the young " Kipling had published *Captains Courageous*, the chief character of which was also a youth in his teens. The book, as he said later, was " not all reportage," but Kipling is very frank in relating how it was pieced together :

Now our Doctor Conland had served in that fleet when he was young. One thing leading to another, as happens in this world, I embarked on a little book which was called *Captains Courageous*. My part was the writing ; his the details. This book took us (he rejoicing to escape from the dread respectability of our little town) to the shore-front, and the old T-wharf of Boston Harbour, and to queer meals in sailors' eating-houses, where he renewed his youth among ex-shipmates or their kin.

We assisted hospitable tug-masters to help haul three-and-four stick schooners of Pocahontas coal all round the harbour ; we boarded every craft that looked as if she might be useful, and we delighted ourselves to the limit of delight. Charts we got—old and new—and the crude implements of navigation such as they used off the Banks, and a battered boat-compass, still a treasure with me. (Also, by pure luck, I had sight of the first sickening uprush and vomit of iridescent coal-dusted water

into the hold of a ship, a crippled iron hulk, sinking at her moorings.) And Conland took large cod and the appropriate knives with which they are prepared for the hold, and demonstrated anatomically and surgically so that I could make no mistake about treating them in print. Old tales, too, he dug up, and the lists of dead and gone schooners whom he had loved, and I revelled in profligate abundance of detail—not necessarily for publication but for the joy of it.

For the student of Kipling's workmanship the book has a special interest, for here more than anywhere his pencil-and-notebook observation had been at play and its results later provided the very story he set out to tell. Yet that story never creaks. The reader catches no glimpse of Kipling looking up his notes or inserting some special scrap of knowledge. The narrative is straightforward and natural, and if one feels that the thing was scarcely worthy of Kipling it is because the characters and not the background lack interest. But boys still love it, and it shares with *Treasure Island* and *The Trumpet Major* the honour of being one of the best three English novels to give a boy in his teens. Kipling may have intended it otherwise, but the kind of success he achieved was more than once unexpected.

CHAPTER VIII

"KIM"

OF this, his greatest achievement in prose, Kipling wrote that it was "nakedly picaresque and plotless." If only it were ! It seems as though Kipling had begun to write a "nakedly picaresque" novel, had taken his two characters and set them to wander freely up and down India, but that his sense of pattern and plot was too much for him and he was impelled to contrive the Great Game, Kim's work for the Secret Service, as an integral part of the story.

Kim, it appears, was the orphan of an Irish Colour-Sergeant and a nursemaid in the Colonel's household. His mother's race is not specified, but was presumably British or Eurasian since she is not referred to as an *ayah*. The child, whose full name was Kimball O'Hara, is left in the charge of an opium-smoking half-caste woman and runs wild among the street-boys of Lahore, wearing Hindu dress as often as not. He is discovered astride Zam Zammah, the great antique bronze gun which stands before the Lahore Museum to this day. (It is to be remembered that Lockwood Kipling was Curator of that Museum.) Kim attaches himself to an old Lama from Tibet who has come down on a pilgrimage to India to visit the places sacred to Buddhism, and also to find a certain river because "whoso bathes in it is washed from all taint and speckle of sin."

The two set off, and the reader's heart goes with them. The old man is simple as a child, guileless, yet with a certain strength of purpose and great dignity. Kim is a gamin, lively, humorous, predatory, with a knowledge of the streets and their people, and a way to their hearts, such as could only come to one who had depended on his wits for his daily bread. He can save the old man from all the cunning blackguardry of the road, can protect the Lama's purse and person and at the same time profit by the reverence of a superstitious people for his Holy Man from a strange country. What could be more delightful than to accompany the two of them on their pilgrimage, to see India with them?

And Kipling gives us a taste of this in Chapters II, III and IV of the book, in which they make a railway journey and proceed along the Grand Trunk Road for a while. The infinite variety of the Indian scene with its rich colours and smells, the changing sounds and the characters of fellow-wayfarers are so radiantly depicted that it remains as an enchanted journey in the mind of the reader, as well as of Kim.

But no. Kim also has a quest. From the doped and drunken maunderings of the father who had died he had distinguished references to a "red bull on a green field" which was somehow to bring him glory—the soldier's description of his regimental flag mystically confused in a mind which was half oriental. And before the pilgrimage is ten days old he comes on the Mavericks (the imaginary Irish Regiment which Kipling had already conceived in his short stories) to which the late O'Hara had belonged. He is seized by a pair of chaplains and eventually sent, at the Lama's expense, to a school for Anglo-Indians, where he is to be turned into a "Sahib."

The reader is as exasperated as Kim himself by this

development. It is true that during each vacation he escapes to the road, to his Lama or to his friend Mahbub Ali, the Pathan horse dealer. It is true that he goes back happily to the gutter, the brothel, the pilgrims' rest, and does so in Indian dress. But from this moment he is no longer the vagrant without caste or race, the resourceful little adventurer of the streets, but a " Sahib." Wearisomely Kipling stresses this, wearisomely he drums into his reader the distinction between Kim and the " natives."

Kim is trained for Secret Service work, which is—also wearisomely—referred to again and again as " the Great Game," and distinguishes himself in it. He does revert to the Indian manner of life and reverts to being the old Lama's disciple. They wander about once more—going this time high into the Himalayas. But the Great Game follows them. It is made eventful, even exciting, and the people engaged in it, Colonel Creighton, the mysterious jeweller Lurgan, and the " fearful " Bengali Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, are all cleverly drawn, but the Secret Service story is no better than John Buchan might have written and never ceases to be a tiresome distraction from the " nakedly "—and magnificently—picaresque.

To appraise the great qualities of the book—and they are many—it is necessary to forget as far as possible this talk of " Sahibs " and " Natives " and the " Great Game " and to treat Kim's work in the Secret Service as something which provides a few of the more lively incidents of travel. While that is possible the whole texture hangs together—it is in such irrelevant scenes as those at Lurgan's shop, or in the character of Lurgan himself, that the story trips and stumbles. Hurree Chunder Mookerjee and Mahbub Ali are essentials to the Indian scene and the fact that they are

introduced as secret agents does not greatly matter. But Creighton and Lurgan have no place in the panorama of Indian life which the book primarily is.

Again it must be stressed that although Kipling could not resist the temptation to introduce this tawdry plot, and apparently felt no regret that Kim, his little Friend of all the World, was destined to spend his life working as a spy for the political department of the British Raj, yet he is resolved not to let this part of his story get out of hand or threaten to dominate the main theme—which is the love between the saintly old man and his disciple and their wanderings in search of the river. The beauty of the book lies in that; in the gentle old Tibetan monk who is drawn to Kim almost against his will. “A day and a half I have waited,” he once told Kim, “not because I was led by any affection towards thee—that is no part of the Way—but, as they said at the Tirthankers’ Temple, because, money having been paid for learning, it was right that I should oversee the end of the matter. They resolved my doubts most clearly. I had a fear that, perhaps, I came because I wished to see thee—misguided by the red mist of affection.” The reader is no more deceived than was Kim by this ingenuousness and accepts the Holy Man’s devotion to Kim as a dominant reality. Accepts, moreover, the love which Kim, the hard-boiled street-Arab, returns, even after he has become a full-fledged “Sahib” who changes his lounge suit for a beggar’s robe.

But there is more to it than that. Although their wanderings are interrupted by Kim’s education and work for Colonel Creighton, yet in the days they spend together in the crowded third-class carriages of trains, in cities, on the road, in the mountains, Kipling contrives to show all

India. Not the India of the “ Sahibs ” moreover, but of the streets and villages, of the mountains and rice-fields, the India of countless races, religions, castes, sub-castes ; of fierce tribal and family love, feuds, treachery and sudden indolence which obliterates them all ; of veiled and garrulous women ; of filthy poverty and concentrated wealth ; of seekers for truth, charlatans, jugglers, beggars ; of money-lenders and their myriad victims ; of waiting vultures ; of flies and disease ; of most luxuriant beauty ; of dust and rain, dust and rain alternately and for ever ; of bizarre superstitions and primitive credulity ; of endless gossip and grave talk over things which to an occidental seem trivial or to be taken for granted ; of infinite gentleness and courtesy—yet of cunning, too, and tortuous lying ; of pungent scents and colours varied and vivid beyond belief ; of prostitutes with painted eyes and farmers with empty bellies ; of obstinate traditionalism ; of haggling greed ; of queer—and to the European, incomprehensible—ideals and loyalties for which men might give their lives, or half their lifetime ; of hot spiced food and hot ungovernable angers ; of little niggling trades which are older than history and have died out everywhere else ; of universal love for money beside impulsive generosity ; of infantile chicanery, corruption which varies only in degree from that of a Prime Minister in a State to that of a constable on the road ; of myriad servants attached to every man of substance and the carrion hangers-on of these ; of all the things, people, scents and sounds which, for a man whose senses are quick enough to perceive them, make India still “ enchanted Hind.”

And these are not shown through the eyes of any Englishman, but, as soon as Kim so gladly leaves behind

his "sahibs," as an Indian might see them. That is the attraction of the book. It is the Road and the Rail, but seen from the dusty halting-place under a mango tree or from the crowded seat—just room enough to squat cross-legged between a soldier and a dancing girl—of an odoriferous third-class carriage.

That it is all, down to the minutest particular, true and sure, that the reproduction is flawless and that every figure in the whole fresco makes its beholder say that he knows that man or woman, is the least of its merits, for this is more than mere landscape or portrait photography. It is a painting, with all a great painting's imaginative proportions, of the multifarious life of an entire sub-continent. Consider some of its deft little details :

The huge, mouse-coloured Brahminee bull of the ward was shouldering his way through the many-coloured crowd, a stolen plantain hanging out of his mouth.

The lama's voice faltered—the periods lengthened. Kim was busy watching a gray squirrel. When the little scolding bunch of fur, close pressed to the branch, disappeared, preacher and audience were fast asleep, the old officer's strong-cut head pillowed on his arm, the lama's thrown back against the tree bole, where it showed like yellow ivory. A naked child toddled up, stared, and, moved by some quick impulse of reverence, made a solemn little obeisance before the lama—only the child was so short and fat that it toppled over sideways, and Kim laughed at the sprawling, chubby legs. The child, scared and indignant, yelled aloud.

They met a troop of long-haired, strong-scented Sansis with baskets of lizards and other unclean food on their backs, the lean dogs sniffing at their heels. These people kept their own side of the road, moving at a quick, furtive jog-trot, and all other castes gave them ample room ; for the Sansi is deep pollution. Behind them, walking wide and stiffly across the strong shadows, the memory of his leg-irons still on him,

strode one newly released from the jail ; his full stomach and shiny skin to prove that the Government fed its prisoners better than most honest men could feed themselves. Kim knew that walk well, and made broad jest of it as they passed. Then an Akali, a wild-eyed, wild-haired Sikh devotee in the blue-checked clothes of his faith, with polished-steel quoits glistening on the cone of his tall blue turban, stalked past, returning from a visit to one of the independent Sikh States, where he had been singing the ancient glories of the Khalsa to college-trained princelings in top-boots and white-cord breeches. Kim was careful not to irritate that man—for the Akali's temper is short and his arm quick. Here and there they met or were overtaken by the gaily dressed crowds of whole villages turning out to some local fair ; the women, with their babes on their hips, walking behind the men, the older boys prancing on sticks of sugar-cane, dragging rude brass models of locomotives such as they sell for a halfpenny, or flashing the sun into the eyes of their betters from cheap toy mirrors. One could see at a glance what each had bought ; and if there were any doubt it needed only to watch the wives comparing dull glass bracelets that come from the North-West. These merry-makers stepped slowly calling one to the other and stopping to haggle with sweetmeat-sellers, or to make a prayer before one of the wayside shrines—sometimes Hindu, sometimes Mussulman—which the low castes of both creeds share with beautiful impartiality. A solid line of blue, rising and falling like the back of a caterpillar in haste, would swing up through the quivering dust and trot past to a chorus of quick cackling. That was a gang of *Changars*—the women who have taken all the embankments of all the Northern Railways under their charge—a flat-footed, big-bosomed, strong-limbed, blue-petticoated clan of earth-carriers, hurrying north on news of a job, and wasting no time by the road. They belong to the caste whose men do not count, and they walked with squared elbows, swinging hips, and heads on high, as suits women who carry heavy weights. A little later a marriage procession would strike into the Grand Trunk with music and shoutings, and a smell of marigold and jasmine stronger even than the reek of the dust. One could see the bride's litter, a blur of red and tinsel, staggering through the haze, while the bridegroom's bewreathed

pony turned aside to snatch a mouthful from a passing fodder-cart. That Kim would join the Kentish-fire of good wishes and bad jokes, wishing the couple a hundred sons and no daughters, as the saying is. Still more interesting and more to be shouted over it was when a strolling juggler with some half-trained monkeys, or a panting, feeble bear, or a woman who tied goats' horns to her feet, and with these danced on a slack-rope, set the horses to shying and the women to shrill, long-drawn quavers of amazement.

Along their track lay the villages of the hill-folk—mud and earth huts, timbers now and then rudely carved with an axe—clinging like swallows' nests against a three-thousand-foot glissade ; jammed into a corner between cliffs that funnelled and focused every wandering blast ; or, for the sake of summer pasture, cowering down on a neck that in winter would be ten feet deep in snow. And the people—the sallow, greasy, duffle-clad people, with short bare legs and faces almost Esquimaux—would flock out and adore.

These are no more than fragments isolated from the vast composition, but the portraits are equally graphic and memorable. Mahbub Ali, the Pathan, with his lime-dyed red beard, his noisy Mohammedanism which does not save him from being made drunk with scented brandy on a certain critical night, his blood-feuds and indifference to death, his sensuality but gruff devotion ; Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, the immortal *babu*, with his great fat legs, his faulty use of English colloquialisms, his feline courage hidden under a mask of "fearfulness," and his curious ambitions ; the shrill and voluble Kulu woman, whose heart was good, and all the momentary figures that flash by—the old Ressaldar with his sword, the Jat with his sick child, the horse-boys, servants, Brahmins, hillmen, Saddhus, who pass in and out of the narrative like the crowd at an Indian railway station.

The book ends with a double crisis. The Russian and

French spies from whom Kim has obtained their all-important documents are hustled away from the chilly hills and Kim's part in "the Great Game" ends when he hands his documentary spoils to the *babu*. (He has received hospitality, incidentally, from a certain Lispeth, the "woman of Shamlegh," who told Kim that once, long ago, she wore European clothes at the mission-house at Kotgarh, thus establishing her identity as that of the mission-trained hill-girl who, in the very first of the *Plain Tales from the Hills*, had waited like Madame Butterfly for a European who had never returned.)

Then comes the greater climax, the Lama's belief that he has at last found his river and "won Salvation for himself and his beloved."

The reader does not finish this novel—he disembarks from it regretfully, remembering the places to which it has carried him, the coloured coastlines and crowded cities he has seen. A score or two of stories in the English language have this faculty of bearing the reader to a land of giants—who never cease to be human—and of giving him that pang of sorrow that the voyage is done, though he will never lose the friends he has made in the course of it.

The characters in *Kim* have that static quality which has been noticed in all Kipling's characters: again they are chessmen ready carved before they are set in place and unchanged at the end. But how cunningly, how exquisitely carved. Not the wood-workers of Saharanpur (behind which ancient city the Kulu woman lived) could more perfectly chisel their smallest detail. With a line or two of dialogue and half a paragraph of description Kipling sets each on his square and though they move to and fro in the book we need no more than the first glimpse he gives us.

CHAPTER IX

“PUCK,” “REWARDS AND FAIRIES”

THESE were the days of “sequels” and Kipling had already written a *Second Jungle Book* after the first, Stevenson had written *Catriona* to *Kidnapped*, Barrie, unfortunately, *Tommy and Grizel* to *Sentimental Tommy*, and Haggard and Doyle had followed the fashion—a fashion which is at the moment unpopular among writers of large successful books. When *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906) caught the public imagination it was followed in 1910 by *Rewards and Fairies*. Each consists of a sequence of short stories in which the children Dan and Una are entertained by the return of people from history and legend who meet them in their own secret corners of their Sussex home, always introduced by the very English sprite Puck, “alias Robin Goodfellow, alias Nick o’ Lincoln, alias Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, the last survivor in England of those whom mortals call Fairies.”

Now it might be supposed that Kipling, who wrote always from direct observation, who spoke of the technical details of a score of crafts as though he had been engaged in them, who seemed to have travelled the world and watched men at work with an ever-ready notebook—mental if not actual—would be at a loss when he began to tackle historical themes for which his “passion for definition” would have to turn to text-books. But not a bit of it. The technical details are here, noted with all the certainty, used

with the effect, that similar details which he had actually observed were given in his modern stories. These fairy-tales are as truly realistic as his stories from the India of his day. He knew, he always knew, just how to insert a fragment of specialised knowledge so that it would give colour and outline to an incident. When he wrote of bridge-builders, shipwrights, soldiers, horses or Indian priests the knowledge was his own. Now that he wrote of history custom had taught him what he needed in order to produce that skilled effect, and whether he obtained his neat authoritative touches from an encyclopaedia or from his own imagination, his narrative is still made actual with them.

He looked down at the horse's feet, and saw the new shoes fastened as only Weland knew how to fasten 'em. (Weland had a way of turning down the nails that folks called the Smith's Clinch.)

The Yellow Man, whose name was Kitai, had with him a brown box. In the box was a blue bowl with red marks upon the rim, and within the bowl, hanging from a fine thread, was a piece of iron no thicker than that grass stem, and as long, maybe, as my spur, but straight. In this iron, said Witta, abode an Evil Spirit which Kitai, the Yellow Man, had brought by Art Magic out of his own country that lay three years' journey southward. The Evil Spirit strove day and night to return to his country, and therefore, look you, the iron needle pointed continually to the South.

To tell the truth, they taught me the Roman step. You see, I'd only served with quick-marching Auxiliaries. A Legion's pace is altogether different. It is a long, slow stride, that never varies from sunrise to sunset. "Rome's Race—Rome's Pace," as the proverb says. Twenty-four miles in eight hours neither more nor less. Head and spear up, shield on your back, cuirass-collar open one hand's breadth—and that's how you take the Eagle through Britain.

Then *he* came up—his long pennant trailing overside—his

waistcloths and netting tore all to pieces where the Spaniards had grappled, and his sides black-smear'd with their gun-blasts like candle-smoke in a bottle. We hooked on to a lower port and hung.

The whole sequence is a clear expression of Kipling's love for England. But it is not quite the love of an Englishman for his homeland which is expressed here, that inarticulate nostalgia which becomes embarrassing in words. It is the love of a man who has first heard the name from a distant country and has come to know his beloved after he has reached manhood. Someone has pointed out that the best descriptions of London have been written by provincials who had never taken the capital for granted, but in childhood had heard of it with awe and in boyhood had longed chiefly to "get to it." Kipling could take nothing English for granted. He was discovering and learning to love the country to the end of his life. He saw and understood things about her which no English-born Englishman would have seen or understood because he would never have known the excitement of discovery. He viewed England and English history affectionately, intimately, shrewdly, but always with wonder, always as a man finding his own birthright.

That suggestion of wonder gives him a peculiar affinity with the children of his book. "Kipling has always been," says Dixon Scott, "one of those blessed born innocents who never grow up, who are never quite at home in the world, but who wander through it, like Hawthorne or Poe, a little alien and elf-like, a little envious of 'the happy folk in housen,' and this quality of envy of the practical grown-ups and genuine worldlings is, indeed, the essential characteristic of the man and the key to and core of his work." Perhaps his loneliness in childhood, perhaps his being "the little

man from India,” in some way isolated him from every society in which he moved. First an English boy among Indian servants, then a self-conscious myopic stranger in an English public school, then a journalist among soldiers and Civil Servants, and finally a wanderer roosting in Sussex—he seemed fated to escape the comfortable gregariousness of others. And this put him in sympathy with animals and children and gave us perhaps these books as well as Mowgli’s adventures. He looked at the Sussex downs as though it was for the first time, and with his Dan and Una travelled happily into the past.

The sequence provides an admirable answer to those who have supposed Kipling to be, philosophically, conservative, a lover of the old order who feared or disliked the new. For in these, as elsewhere, while he is most sensitively conscious of Change he never bemoans it. Though the stories are told in the Sussex of the first decade of the century with telegraph poles filing across the downs, railway lines cutting the denes, motor-cars beginning their noisy procession through the lanes, never once is there a suggestion of regret or a hint of exasperation at the broken peace. On the contrary the theme of the sequence, if it may be fairly condensed into a few words, is the all-enduring all-surviving spirit of England, constant to certain fundamentals but absorbing, reforming, developing through the centuries. This is stressed by the unvarying background, and the artless variety of period. A fair proportion of the stories told by the cheerful and substantial ghosts who visit Dan and Una are set in the corner of Sussex in which the children lived, and landmarks which had survived play their part in them. Old Hobden, the poacher, is a descendant of Hob of the Dene whom Puck had known in Danish times, and the

children's "Forge Mill—*our* Mill" is "that newly invented watermill below the Forge" to Parnesius the Centurion of nearly two thousand years ago. Yet author and imaginary narrators and the children themselves are unperturbed by the constant changes in outward things—indeed the old craftsmen of the stories are interested in modern methods and never regret their own.

The stories indeed are more often than not concerned with sweeping changes, movements of invading races, new religions, new civilisations, considered sometimes in allegory, sometimes quite simply and personally through the old narrator's eyes. The last stand of the Romans in a country threatened by Picts and Danes alike, the ousting of the Norse Gods by Christianity, the New World, the Norman Conquest—or right back to the end of the Stone Age and the coming of Iron in that fine and terrible story, "The Knife and the Naked Chalk." Change is the very substance of more than half of the tales and is viewed always with a steady detachment.

There is another and more thoughtless criticism of Kipling which is disputed here—that he was a propagandist in prose, a writer who was for ever trying to make out a case. If this had been true what excellent opportunities these stories would have provided. With his matchless ingenuity in such things he could have taught a lesson in every tale, could have made them into parables—and without loss of entertainment. But nowhere is he guilty of this.

For here, once again, it was the story which came first. Why search for the doctrine or private sympathies of the writer when his object is, as ever, to tell a tale and tell it as well as he could? Those two beautiful stories of the last Romans left by their warring emperors on the island and

facing the fearful desolation and dangers of the Wall would, I suppose, by the wildly far-fetched, be called a warning to Imperial England with her regiments out along the North-West Frontier of India and quarrelling parties at home. But why suppose anything of the sort? Why try to gather from "The Treasure and the Law" Kipling's attitude towards Jews or towards Anti-Semitism? Or from "The Conversion of St. Wilfred" his feelings about Catholicism? He never waits to make artificial points. There are no polemics here. It is the polished stone of a many-faceted narrative that he seeks to present in a brilliant setting, an article if you like of luxury and ornament: art, in fact, always and very much for the sake of art.

And with what patient cleverness he succeeds. In these two books his technique, if not his inspiration, reached its height. Perhaps, for the first time, there is a little too much cunning in his work, though however intricate the stories they never lack spontaneity. Again to quote Dixon Scott—"If the reader will turn back to those wise fairy-tales he will see that each is really fourfold: a composite tissue made up of a layer of sunlit story (Dan's and Una's plane), on a layer of moonlit magic (plane of Puck), on a layer of history-story stuff (Rene's plane and Gloriana's), on a last foundation of delicately bedimmed but never doubtful allegory." It almost seems as though Kipling was conscious of his own virtuosity. He himself wrote afterwards of these two books: "I worked the material in three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves according to the shifting light of sex, youth and experience. It was like working lacquer and mother o' pearl, a natural combination, into the same scheme as niello and grisaille, and trying not to let the joins show." The joins do not

show. There is no self-consciousness in the delicate work. The most that can be said is that Kipling has learnt detachment, that he does not approach his task with quite the same boyish eagerness to get his story down on paper. The stories are never fabricated, never unspontaneous, but they are more scrupulously chiselled than those of the early books. And, if it may be said of a writer who scarcely ever used an unnecessary word, more economical.

CHAPTER X

LATER SHORT STORIES

KIPLING settled at Bateman's in 1902, and from then till his death in 1936 his output in fiction consisted of six books of short stories—*Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917), *Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides* (1923), *Debts and Credits* (1926) and *Limits and Renewals* (1932)—an average of two or three short stories a year for the last thirty-four years of his life. It is significant that his autobiography gives only twenty-eight pages to this period, though in years it was nearly half his lifetime. He was a comparatively rich man and could luxuriate in the things that so many writers have wanted—slow maturing of his plans, polishing, re-writing, scrapping, selecting to his heart's content. He has himself suggested his own process to other writers :

This leads me to the Higher Editing. Take of well-ground Indian Ink as much as suffices and a camel-hair brush proportionate to the interspaces of your lines. In an auspicious hour, read your final draft and consider faithfully every paragraph, sentence and word, blacking out where requisite. Let it lie by to drain as long as possible. At the end of that time, re-read and you should find that it will bear a second shortening. Finally, read it aloud alone and at leisure. Maybe a shade more brushwork will then indicate or impose itself. If not, praise Allah and let it go, and "when thou hast done, repent not."

The shorter the tale, the longer the brushwork and, normally, the shorter the lie-by, and *vice versa*. The longer the tale, the less brush but the longer lie-by. I have had tales by me for three or five years which shortened themselves almost yearly.

All these later tales (though the earliest of them must go back to Kim's time) are what Kipling called "pummiced ivory-smooth," but never over-written. He does not hesitate and search for words or visibly form his phrases as Pater did. He is always at ease, unhurried but never distracted from his theme. He seems to have been content to become an Elder Craftsman. No longer audible is the confident chuckle of the early stories, the air of "I can do it, you just watch." His stories, on the contrary, open quietly now, sometimes slowly, and go steadily forward to their riotous or wistful climax.

But it is not so much in the manner of them as in the matter that there is the most notable change from the tales which Kipling had written in the last century. Then he was sometimes satisfied with a plot—now every story has an idea. No longer is the picture or incident which is to form the basis of five thousand words of skilled narrative hastily grabbed because it can suitably lead to a neat situation, a prettily turned last paragraph. No longer are the characters themselves designed to fit the gaps in an artful mosaic. First, now, is the theme, and there has been time to choose it from a dozen. The plot is there and is often crisp and clever, but it does not twist its characters from their natural growth.

Except for one story, rather unsubstantial compared with its predecessors, the soldiers three have disappeared, alas, and in their place is Mr. Pyecroft of the Royal Navy. (Kipling

had been on naval exercises with the Home Fleet.) Pycroft is a joy and Kipling's contemporary readers must have learnt to anticipate with relish the outrageous events which followed his every appearance. But they missed Mulvaney, Learoyd and Ortheris and looked in vain for their reappearance with Private Copper in South Africa, and never knew quite the same frank friendship with any of the later reappearing characters. It seemed a little unfair that Kipling who liked to turn back and find his old and well-tried creations—he was still breathing fresh life into the mummy of Mr. King in 1926—should altogether have abandoned his comrades from Lahore. But perhaps he felt that in *Kim* he had satisfied himself wholly with the rich food of India for, with the exception of a fragment called "The Debt" in his last book and three sketches in his book for Scouts and Guides, Kipling never wrote another story with an Indian setting. The nearest he came to it was in "A Sahib's War," which is about a Sikh officer in South Africa, while "In the Presence" most faithfully portrays Gurkhas in England and in "A Deal in Cotton" a leading part is played by an Indian bearer.

His stories followed the course of his own life. Kipling, as we have seen, made authenticity one of the highest virtues, and although he is in no mean sense autobiographical, it is not hard to see that he sometimes turned personal experience to account. There are, first of all, the Boer War stories. Then came that classic of early motoring, "Steam Tactics," in which, Kipling says, he faithfully drew the nature and attributes of his first car, a Loco-mobile. "The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat" also gives a picture of motoring while it was yet a novelty to literature and even in "They," to which it was incidental, Kipling could not

resist a few realistic lines which only a pioneer motorist could have written.

In three stories he told of a man, or a man and wife, learning their way to the heart of an English country home—"An Habitation Enforced," "My Son's Wife" and "Beauty Spots." The brook at the end of the garden at Bateman's with its ancient mill not only flows through *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, but trickles or floods in "An Habitation Enforced," "Below the Mill Dam" and "Friendly Brook."

In *Something of Myself* Kipling describes his home at Torquay, outwardly large and bright but inwardly burdened with a "brooding Spirit of deep, deep despondency." It cannot be doubted that in "The House Surgeon" he gave point to this. His stories of the First World War turn inevitably on loss, though in neither "Mary Postgate" nor "The Gardener" is it a son who has been killed as Kipling's own boy was. It would not be true to say that Kipling owed more to personal experience in his later writings than he had done in such straightforward autobiography as "Baa Baa Black Sheep," or the early part of "The Man who Would be King." But it is not fanciful, I think, to see in these six books the very natural outcome of his life from 1902 onwards, the life of a man who had travelled widely and with trained observation, a man who travelled still, a well-to-do man who owed his material success to nobody and nothing but his own ability, a man who loved humour for its own sake, a householder much visited by friends and wanderers and men of action, a husband and father, and above all an Englishman who had come home to be absorbed by his own country.

Almost every story in these latter collections has its parent

in the earlier ones, for Kipling remained faithful to certain types of tale, however much his exercises in each type varied or matured. "Brugglesmith," for instance, that crazy farce in which Kipling piled absurdity on absurdity till it seemed that he would rouse the London night about him in guffaws, is the legitimate forebear of "The Bonds of Discipline," a monstrous pantomime on board a cruiser when a foreign agent is discovered as a stowaway and is treated to an exhibition which includes a ratings' tra-party on the bridge and culminates in the sham execution of a Marine for murder and his burial at sea, all of which the agent notes and subsequently publishes to the world. This in turn leads to "Steam Tactics" in the same book. Here a policeman trying to enforce the speed limit is kidnapped and left at night in a park where the owner keeps wild animals at large. So to "The Puzzler," an extravaganza in *Actions and Reactions*, in which the Lord Chief Justice with a stump-leg barrel-organ strapped to his shoulder joins an Italian organ-grinder in chasing a monkey through a strange house, the owner and his wife arriving while the hunt is in progress in the bedrooms. Kipling's greatest achievement in this class was "The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat" in *A Diversity of Creatures*. No other English writer has attempted sheer farce on this scale, so that the superlatives which suggest themselves are scarcely necessary. Starting simply, with a conscious platitude ("Our drive till then had been quite a success"), it goes forward with an awful inevitability through a series of wild imbecilities till the noise of its rhapsodic foolery fills the world. It is, incidentally, a tale of vengeance—not for some serious crime, but for stupidity and malice, and Kipling takes care to have the reader on the side of the avengers, and to give him the

incidental pleasure of seeing that vengeance magnificently fulfilled. In the same collection are two more such tales, "The Horse Marines" and "The Vortex," the latter a grand piece of nonsense between a bore and a swarm of bees. But it is perhaps significant that this is printed immediately before his first two war stories of 1915, and thereafter he did not again let himself go in burlesque until, in his last collection, *Limits and Renewals*, he does so, though with restraint, in "Beauty Spots."

There are three studies in the mentality of the Indian soldier, the parentage of which may be found in the later titles of *Life's Handicap*—"A Sahib's War," "In the Presence," and "The Debt." And there are three stories of the supernatural—though how far they have come from "The Phantom 'Rickshaw" and "The Mark of the Beast." "They" is one of the most graceful and tender things Kipling wrote, itself haunted by the ghosts of the children who are in it. The crude effects of the early ghost stories—and ghost stories, no more, they seem in retrospect as one feels the "little brushing kiss" of this one—are forgotten and here are the first mournful suggestions of personal grief, the first sad notes which were to sound more often in the last years of Kipling's life. In "The House Surgeon" there is a little more contrivance and consciousness, but this again is finely written enough to make its forerunners seem lurid. And "The Wish House" is a quiet and most moving love-story in which the supernatural is used to excellent purpose, but is not dominant.

The army tales of the early books have strange progeny after the outbreak of war in 1914. "Private Copper" and "Mrs. Bathurst" might have been told by one of the original trio, and "Garm, a Hostage" is actually about

Ortheris. But when Kipling creates his war-time Lodge, and tells "The Madonna of the Trenches," it has little of the irresponsibility of the Indian narratives, though it might be considered as the offspring of "Love o' Women." "A Friend of the Family," another tale of satisfying vengeance in which a one-legged Australian fakes an air-raid on an English village to avenge his dead chum, has more of the old spirit.

"The Enemies to Each Other" and "On the Gate" recall to me "Children of the Zodiac" or the mythological scene in "The Bridge-builders," and "A Deal in Cotton" is the direct descendant of "Only a Subaltern" and "The Tomb of his Ancestors." "An Habitation Enforced" is also, of course, in the lineage of "An Error in the Fourth Dimension," while "Below the Mill Dam" and "The Mother Hive" are in that of "A Walking Delegate."

The rather stark little melodramas of the last century have become more human, but the category remains and "Friendly Brook," "In the Same Boat" and "Mary Postgate" are the legitimate children of "At the End of the Passage."

Finally, there is a kind of rag in short-story form which comes right down from "The Three Musketeers." It consists in making certain people, along with the reader, conscious that some one unsympathetic character is being mischievously fooled, in leading him, all unconscious of everyone else's grins, through circumstances which have been built up by his tormentors for his final humiliation. Kipling could never forget the motif for long. "The Impressionists" in *Stalky and Co.* is a good example, but it recurs in "The Bonds of Discipline" and again, most flagrantly, in "The Little Foxes," "The Honours of War"

and "Beauty Spots." "The Propagation of Knowledge" is yet another though a kindlier version of it. The Dupes in these stories are nicely chosen. Mr. Prout, the heavy-handed and gullible housemaster in "The Impressionists," and the foreign agent in "The Bonds of Discipline" were easy victims. But nearer to Kipling's taste is Mr. Lathabie Groombride, the politician from "the parish of Westminster" ("Little Foxes"), who believes the stories told him of the Gihon Hunt, "that they habitually flogged to death good revenue-paying cultivators who neglected to stop earths; but that the few, the very few, who did not die under the hippo-hide whips soaked in copperas, walked about on their gangrenous ankle-bones, and were known in derision as the Mudir's Cranes." How Mr. Groombride is sent to investigate and his quite appalling humiliation is told with such glee that one senses in it all Kipling's loathing for the inefficiency and officiousness of politicians who attempt to interfere with his heroes—the men on the spot. Then Wontner, the intellectual subaltern of "The Honours of War," who talked too much, who "didn't join till he was twenty-three," who "used to lecture on tactics in the ante-room," who "*would* talk about the varsity—he got a degree there," and worst of all, who couldn't take a joke, was a victim pre-ordained and a very sorry man when Kipling had done with him. (He mistook Stalky for a Territorial and Kipling for a Journalist, among other crimes.) King is the unrepentant stool-pigeon in "The Propagation of Knowledge." And Major Kniveat, "who expected his name to be pronounced 'kniveed,' the *t* being soft in that very particular family," soon shapes up, in "Beauty Spots," as promising prey. He is slanderous and interfering. He supervises the official cutting down of trees on the estate of

a wealthy man who has come to settle in a country district ; he spends his Sunday patrolling the right-of-way through the settler's estate. And finally, of course, to the infinite satisfaction of the writer, the reader, the wealthy man and his son, he is metaphorically rolled in the muck of the pig Angelique's sty.

The stories written in the last decade of his life are technically brilliant, but some of the inner fire has gone down. A quality almost of boyishness, a gusto which pervaded even his most morbid scenes and made more brutal his most gory details, has given place to a crude realism in which disease and death are commonplace rather than dramatic. " My young head was in a ferment of new things seen and realised at every turn," he says of his early days, and his first stories convey a suggestion of the writer having to be almost forcibly held back from pen and paper. The last stories are not forced or formal, but in them one feels that it is an old craftsman at work, who knows his tools and his materials and will not fail, but who does not go at it with the furious creative drive that once inspired him. He is not tired or indifferent or irritable, he is not even disillusioned. But he does not whistle at his work, he does not grin or gasp at his own cleverness.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

THE present age cannot assess with detachment the writings of a man who has been held to glorify war, who has been branded imperialist and jingoist, who has even—perhaps because he was in the highest sense authoritarian—had the word “fascist” thrown at his head. His eclipse is as natural as it is temporary. The issues which seem so important at this moment will lose their edge and there will remain the good stories, the gay, the tragic, the spontaneous, the beautifully-told stories, to delight posterity. It will not be long before the question of his complicity or otherwise in the barbaric philosophy which was popular fifty years ago will be uninteresting, but his Lama and Disciple will still be on the road and his Puck will grin through a Sussex thicket.

Even now it does not seem very important. Was he an imperialist? Did he, as Richard le Gallienne suggested, fall into the old Jewish error of concluding that his own people were “the chosen of the Universe and under the special care of the great Invisible powers”? I think this is a fantastic exaggeration of his general belief that the white man was more fitted to the task of government than, for instance, the Indian, and of his faith in the English—never articulated but clearly held—as about the best breed of white men just then active. Of Fascism there is never a suggestion

in his work, or in any public utterance. He liked authority and the right man for the job. But always above men, above "the captains and the kings," was the Law. It rings through Kipling's whole work like a chime—the Law to which principalities and powers must conform, to which even that mysterious entity—half Wesleyan Jehovah, half Mohammedan Allah—who was on paper his God, must own allegiance. This is the very negation of everything which may be considered a coherent Fascist creed. He did not need to remove the Hindu swastika from the covers of his books when Hitler adopted it. His Aerial Board of Control had little in common with the League of Nations, but nothing at all in common with the Axis.

"Kipling has always been one of those blessed born innocents who never grow up." Yes, but he was no Peter Pan, no airy-fairy gnome among "the happy folk in housen." It was not a changeling but a schoolboy that he in some sense remained to the end of his life. For most of the years in which his output was formidable he continued to view life as a lark, a god-sent organised rag, such as an Olympian Stalky and a superhuman M'Turk and a divine Beetle might have planned for the discomfiture of some diabolic "King." Even its tragedies for a long time did no more than give a satisfactory colour and drama to this supernal child's play. Beetle the schoolboy it was who could appreciate the lion-hearted Stalky and the anarchic M'Turk, and Kipling the man and the writer remained loyal to them and all their kind, and celebrated their massacre of Afghans and shouted "Give 'em hell, men! Oh, give 'em hell!" when their train was attacked in the Soudan, and gamely defended their licentious soldiery, and tripped up the politicians who tried to interfere with them.

Stalky's photograph does not lie and Kipling at sixteen had a man's moustache, but Kipling at thirty had a schoolboy's heart. It sent him down into the engine-rooms of ships asking "how it worked"; it sent him to watch men doing strange and interesting and violent things and to record exactly how they did them. It sent him among children and soldiers with whom he felt kindred.

It may be that the First World War and the loss of his only son put an end to this notion of life as a school rag, but only, I think, to replace it with a question mark. If it isn't just fun, a glorious scramble in which good work brings good marks and there are plenty of unpleasant ushers to mortify, if it isn't this, asks the hurt schoolboy, what is it? In the comparatively little work he did during the last twenty years of his life Kipling seems plaintively to be asking himself the question.

There was something schoolboyish even in his use of language, for all the diamond-studded brilliance of his prose. He has an oblique way of referring to things which a schoolboy finds embarrassing, such as love and religion. Throughout *Something of Myself*, which he wrote when he was nearly seventy, he refers to his mother as "the Mother" and his wife as "the Committee of Ways and Means." When he does write of love he does so from an angle, or rushes at it wildly as in "Love o' Women." And as every schoolboy is a mimic, Kipling cannot leave dialect alone. His dialect is authentic enough—conscientious would be the better word. But how one wishes now that he could have been satisfied with reproducing the idiom of his cockneys, Scots, Irishmen, Yorkshiremen, and Sussex farmers. For slang, too, he had a schoolboy's relish, and must have made at least a mental dictionary of it, bagging each new specimen

as it emerged. The reader is pulled up half a dozen times as he re-reads the early stories by examples of slang which, he would have supposed, belong to a much later period. ("Can do," says Moorshed in 1904.) And how delighted and amused is Kipling to show off his knowledge of a genuinely new piece of slang when it comes into currency. He had used the word "camouflage" in its slangier sense three or four times before 1918.

I am not trying to suggest by all this that the genius of Kipling was in some way immature, or that he suffered from arrested development—(which was not a malady until we got a name for it). As a writer he was as seasoned as sun-bleached walnut. But it has been said that every artist keeps one foot in the nursery, and there was some part of Kipling—an emotional rather than a mental part—which never left school. Remembering Beetle's false quantities one wonders whether it was this part of him which made Kipling such a shrewd observer, so accurate in reproducing what he had seen but so slack in what his father called "looking up his references." There is a story, for instance, called "The Bull that Thought," in which Kipling surprisingly shows a first-hand knowledge of the bull-ring, which must have cost him, a great animal-lover, hours of misery, then from sheer carelessness bungles his Spanish and writes "the Guarda Civile."

The advice Kipling once gave to an aspiring writer was—"Paddle your own canoe. Never look over your shoulder at what the other fellows are doing." He certainly followed his own counsel. It is hard now to trace any literary influence which affected him after his earliest stories. (Bret Harte is usually remembered in connection with these.) When one considers that he was partly brought up in a

pre-Raphaelite household, that William Morris was his "Deputy Uncle Topsy," that a visitor was "an elderly person called Browning," that he was taken as a child to see William de Morgan, that "somewhere in the background were people called Jean Ingelow and Christina Rossetti," and when one notes the books to which he had access as a boy it is surprising to find him so underivative. Moreover, he lived and worked through a period in which English fiction, as we can see easily enough now, was in good hands. After the short period of sheer exhaustion which had succeeded Dickens and Thackeray, there was an uprush which seems to have received less attention from professional critics than the scented follies of the men of the 'Nineties.

Of a generation or two before his, but still writing and publishing as he came to fame were Hardy, Stevenson, Meredith, Louis Becke, Henry James, and Mallock. His contemporaries, or nearly so, were Maugham, Galsworthy, Conan Doyle, Barrie, Hewlett, Wells, Arnold Bennett, Chesterton, Cunninghame Graham, George Moore and Joseph Conrad. Yet with which of these names can Kipling's for any reason be bracketed? Many of the men he must have known; a few may have been his friends. But whatever he called Burne-Jones and Morris as a small boy, as a writer he had no uncles or cousins.

If a comparison is to be made with a contemporary of his perhaps it should be with Joseph Conrad. Both men came to England from afar. Conrad spoke no word of English till he was seventeen, Kipling as a child had to be cautioned to speak English with his father and mother, and "haltingly translated out of the vernacular idiom that one thought and dreamed in." This left its mark on the work of each of them. For all its grace and florid beauty Conrad's

prose had a faintly foreign accent, and Kipling's allusiveness, his suggestive imagery and love of apt metaphor owed more than has been recognised to the Hindustani of his most impressionable age.

Then both wrote of the sea, Conrad as though it were something more than an element, Kipling as though he had deliberately visited its farthest reaches and studied its every mood. And both loved the East—though here their attitudes were reversed ; for Kipling it was a dusky but quite comprehensible foster-mother whom he wished to interpret to his fellow-Englishmen, while Conrad found it " inscrutable " and viewed it always with the sense of wonder which he voiced unforgettably in *Youth*. Conrad most beautifully embroidered ; Kipling chipped and polished to the shape within the stone. Conrad's work, even when he was a young man, had an air of melancholy—there is heartbreak in his sunniest stories. Kipling for the most part is as happy as Kim buying sweetmeats in the bazaar. Conrad holds delicate balances and weighs motives and worth as grimly as Justice herself ; Kipling is a partisan who backs his heroes to the last. But each man held the unfashionable belief that the task of the story-teller is to tell a story, and no two writers of their time succeeded more triumphantly.

It happens that they once chose the same—or almost the same—theme. Kipling's " Sea Constables " and Conrad's " The Tale " are both about the doubtful activities of a neutral ship during the First World War, and both end in disaster, the one for the ship, the other for the ship's captain. Each is told to an audience and in each there is tension and a strong desire roused in the reader to know " what will happen next."

Conrad's " The Tale " opens most characteristically with

“ the crepuscular light dying out slowly in a great square gleam without colour,” “ the irresistible tide of the night ” and “ the whispering of a man’s voice, passionately interrupted and passionately renewed,” which “ seemed to plead against the answering murmurs of infinite sadness.” The man rises from beside a reclining woman and stands over her for a moment “ masculine and mysterious in his immobility.” Then the woman invites him to tell her a tale, and he does so. It is about the commanding officer of “ a ship of a sort.” Here the man reminds the woman, as though he were Conrad himself, that though his tales have often been professional they have never been technical, so he just tells her that the ship was “ of a very ornamental sort once, with lots of grace and elegance and luxury about her. Yes, once ! She was like a pretty woman who had suddenly put on a suit of sackcloth and stuck revolvers in her belt.” Then he goes on to tell with all the introspective detail of which Conrad was master how the commanding officer, cruising on a certain coast, corners a neutral ship which, he has every reason to suspect, has been supplying submarines. A boarding officer reports that there is nothing suspicious about the cargo or crew, but the commanding officer decides to go aboard himself. He hears a story from the captain of the cornered ship which “ struck him as more plausible than simple truth is in the habit of being,” and all the while the commanding officer has been aware of “ an inward voice, a grave murmur in the depth of his very own self, telling another tale, as if on purpose to keep alive in him his indignation and his anger with that baseness of greed or of mere outlook which lies often at the root of simple ideas.” Finally, he decides that the neutral ship is guilty. Her captain says he does not know where he is and the

commanding officer gives him a course which would lead him "straight on a deadly ledge of rock." "He steamed out—ran on it—and went down." Then the commanding officer, telling his story to the woman, abandons all pretence. "Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe—no, I don't believe. I don't know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don't know whether I have done stern retribution—or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don't know. I shall never know."

"Sea Constables" is also recounted by the commanding officer of a ship with much the same duties. There is also a woman in his audience, "a foreign actress" who overhears the story told in a fashionable London restaurant to three other naval men—and told, incidentally, with a wealth of technical detail and names of ships which would have lost the narrator his commission in the later war, if not at that time. Sir Francis Maddingham is a middle-aged banker who had commissioned *Hilarity* in the summer before the war, and comes on a neutral with a cargo of oil. He takes her into an English port and is reprimanded by the Admiralty for interfering with a neutral ship whose papers are in order, but it is suggested to him by Tegg of the Admiralty—who is among the four diners now—that he should see the neutral on her way to Antigua, for which port she claims to be bound. She tries to elude him, pretends to have engine trouble, and puts into an Irish port where "you can't repair a dinghy." Maddingham boards her and finds the captain dying of bronchial pneumonia.

"I was perfectly polite. I said to him: 'Try to be reasonable, sir. If you had got rid of your oil where it was wanted, you'd

have condemned lots of people to death just as surely as if you'd drowned 'em.' 'Ah, but I didn't,' he said. 'That ought to count in my favour.' 'That was no thanks to you,' I said. 'You weren't given the chance. This is war, sir. If you make up your mind to that, you'll see that the rest follows.' 'I didn't imagine you'd take it as seriously as all that,' he said—and he said it quite seriously, too. 'Show a little consideration. Your side's bound to win anyway.' I said: 'Look here! I'm a middle-aged man, and I don't suppose my conscience is any clearer than yours in many respects, but this is business. I can do nothing for you.'"

"You got that a bit mixed, I think," said Tegg critically.

"He saw what I was driving at," Maddingham replied, "and he was the only one that mattered for the moment. 'Then I'm a dead man, Mr. Maddingham,' he said. 'That's your business,' I said. 'Good afternoon.' And I went out."

"And?" said Winchmore, after some silence.

"He dies. I saw his flag half-masted next morning."

There was another silence. Henri looked in at the alcove and smiled. Maddingham beckoned to him.

"But why didn't you lend him a hand to settle his private affairs?" said Portson.

"Because I wasn't acting in my private capacity. I'd been on the bridge for three nights and——" Maddingham pulled out his watch—"This time to-morrow I shall be there again—confound it! Has my car come, Henri?"

"Yes, Sare Francis. I am sorry." They all complimented Henri on the dinner.

The whole point of Conrad's interpretation, it will be seen, is the agony of the narrator who does not know whether he has done "stern retribution or murder." The whole point of Kipling's is that he doesn't give a cuss. It was war and that was that. Kipling writes crisply. His dialogue is full of authentic slang—there are even the harmless first two lines of a limerick quoted. There is a mass of technical detail. ("Where did you mount that one-pounder of yours, after all?" 'Midships. *Ethelreda*

won't carry more weight forward. She's wet enough as it is.' ” “ We were running as near as nothing south. The wind had dropped, and there was a useful cross-rip coming up from the south-east. I took the wheel and, the way I nursed him from starboard, he had to take the sea over his port bow.”) Kipling, it will be noticed, almost with bravado makes his tale be told by a sailor to sailors. Conrad's sole audience is a woman. One would have thought it was Kipling and not Conrad who held his Master's certificate.

I cannot find any record that the two men felt any special interest in each other's work. Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham in 1897—“ in the chaos of printed matter Kipling's *ébauches* appear by contrast finished and impeccable,” and when *The Mirror of the Sea* was published Kipling wrote Conrad “ an enthusiastic little note.” They seemed unconscious that as writers they had anything in common.

It is ten years since Kipling's death. But it is half a century since his genius reached its full summer. During all that time he has suffered from arbitrary labelling, from the critical habit of categorisation. In this book I have been concerned with his work in fiction and in the whole of it I can find no reason to brand him as the servant of any ism—indeed, it would be hard to name a writer whose stories are more free from propaganda, whose creed, in religion or politics, is less blatant. Likes and dislikes he quite certainly felt, and was never afraid to show them. But where are his theories, where are his attempts to persuade? He scorned an attitude of detachment towards any struggle—he was heart and soul on one side or the other as he wrote. But he was a personal champion, not consistently devoted to any set of ideas. To picture him as a vulgar tub-thumper

a vociferous prophet of Empire, is wilfully to ignore the great bulk of his work and see only the signs of his time and place which occasionally obtrude themselves. In some of his poems he ranted and bellowed to the tune of his day. In some of his early stories the same raucousness is audible. But it is soon forgotten as one reads on, as the pageant goes forward in the sunlight of India or across the Sussex downs.

He was the least egotistic of writers. Even *Something of Myself* is about other people far more than it is about Kipling. All contemporary endeavours to make a popular figure of the man himself were defeated by his natural modesty and his quiet determination to be left alone to do the job for which he was fitted, the only job which interested him : the noble and eternal job of telling a good story.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1865. Born in Bombay.
- 1871. Sent to England.
- 1878. United Services College, Westward Ho !
- 1882. Rejoined parents in India. Employed on editorial staff
Lahore Civil and Military Gazette.
- 1887. Assistant editor Allahabad *Pioneer*
- 1889. Returned to England.
- 1890. *Plain Tales from the Hills.*
- 1891. Voyage to South Africa, Ceylon, New Zealand. *Life's
Handicap. The Light that Failed.*
- 1892. Married Caroline Starr Balestier. *Wee Willie Winkie. The
Naulahka.* Honeymoon world tour. Settled in Vermont
U.S.A.
- 1893. *Many Inventions.*
- 1894. *The Jungle Book.*
- 1895. *Soldiers Three. The Second Jungle Book.*
- 1896. Returned to England. Settled at Torquay. *Captains
Courageous.*
- 1898. Cruise with the Home Fleet. Settled at Rottingdean. *The
Day's Work.*
- 1899. U.S.A. Serious illness. Death of his daughter Josephine.
Stalky and Co.
- 1900. South Africa. *From Sea to Sea.*
- 1901. *Kim.*
- 1902. Settled at Bateman's, Burwash, Sussex.
- 1904. *Traffics and Discoveries.*
- 1906. *Puck of Pook's Hill.*
- 1909. *Actions and Reactions.*
- 1910. *Rewards and Fairies.*
- 1914-18. During First World War his only son was killed in action.
- 1917. *A Diversity of Creatures.*
- 1920. *Letters of Travel.*

1926. *Debits and Credits.*

1928. *A Book of Words.*

1932. *Limits and Renewals.*

1936. Jan. 18th, Kipling died in Middlesex Hospital.

Note.—The dates given of Kipling's prose works are of first publication in England.

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